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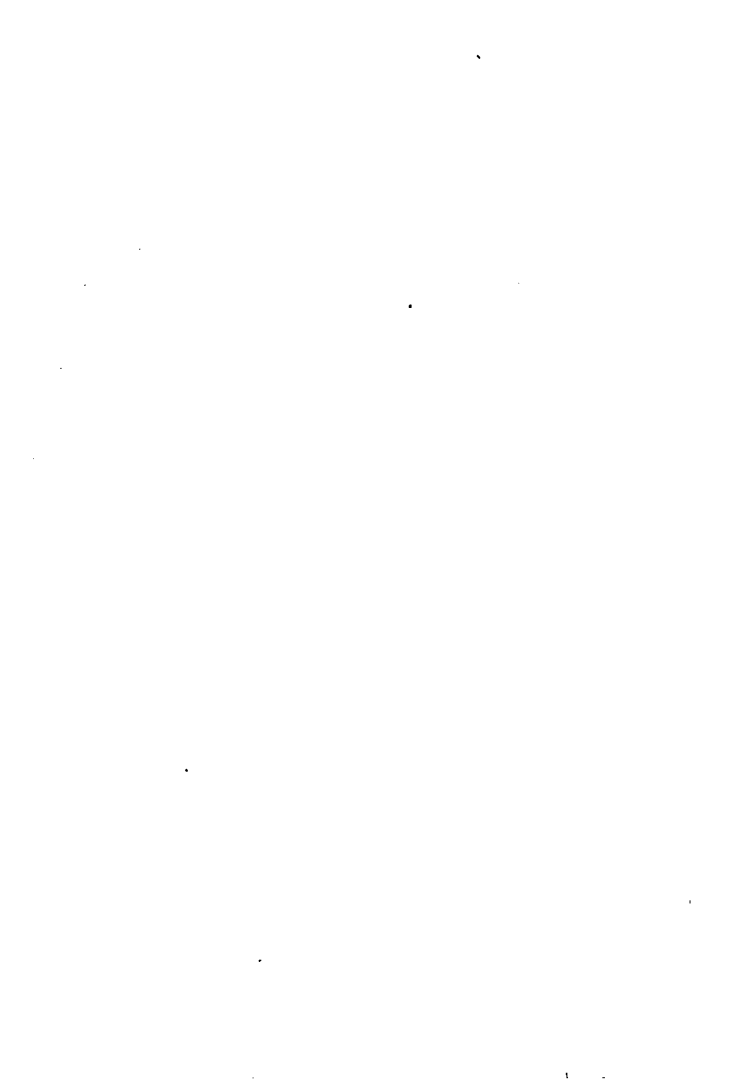


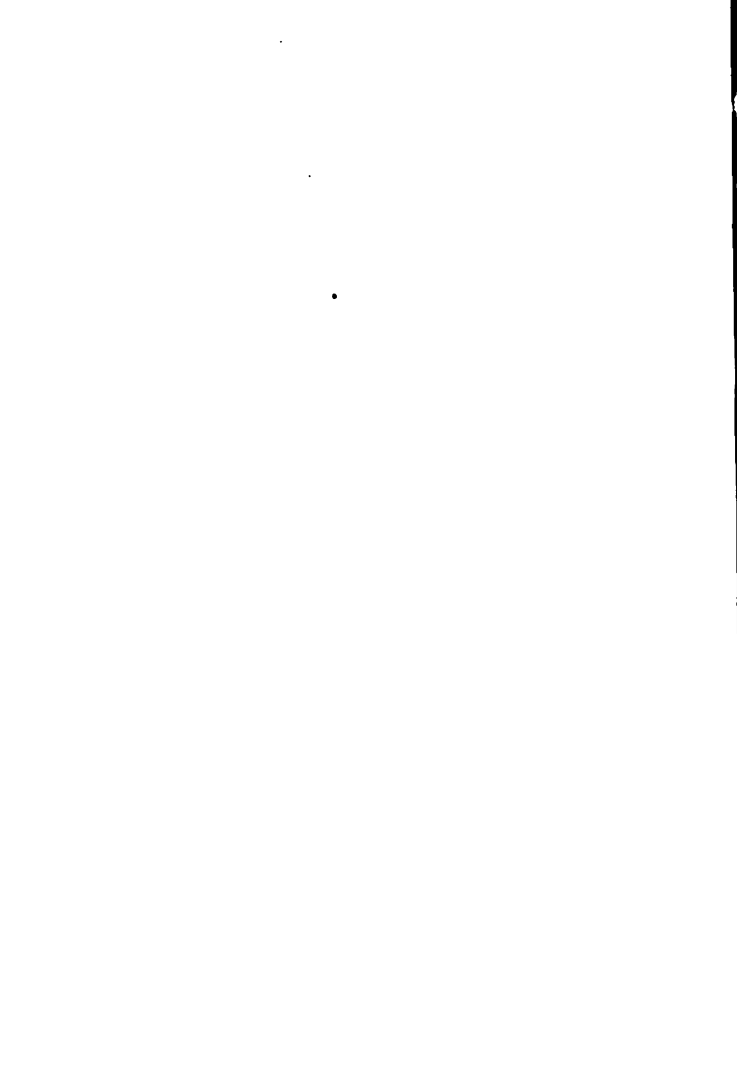
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JACK AND THREE JILLS.

A NOVEL.

Francis BY
Charles
F. C. PHILIPS,

AUTHOR OF "AS IN A LOOKING GLASS," ETC.

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JACK AND THREE JILLS.

CHAPTER I.

My earliest recollections are of a strange little country house down in Essex. It was a snug house of red brick, tiled with blue slate, which looked as if it might have come out of a box of Dutch toys, or have been swept and transplanted bodily by a whirlwind from some brick-field suburb of London—Langley, let us say—and allowed to drop itself into the centre of fat grazing meadows and deep stagnant dykes and big elms, where rooks held their conclave, and shrieked defiance at the sparrow-hawk and owl, having themselves a keen eye to the adjacent domicile of the wood-pigeon, and the unprotected excavation of the plover. Nature is still luxuriant in Essex, and the Essex mind is not so much intolerant of new ideas as incapable of ideas of any kind. No Essex labourer has ever heard of anything, or ever talks of anything, or, if he reads, has ever read of anything beyond a radius of fourteen

miles—which makes twenty-eight for going and returning—from his own home. Suffolk is sometimes called “Silly Suffolk”; the agricultural population of Essex has not even the wit to be silly. It is the connecting link between man and the gorilla, if you commence by denuding the gorilla of his brutal and aggressive attributes. For the Essex louts are peaceable, and in their way kindly, and even courteous. This is the most that Christianity has done for them, although Essex livings are as well endowed as any in England.

My father was an Essex squire, and as like other Essex squires as are peas and mould-made bricks and empty oyster-shells to one another. Study, aided by the microscope, may perhaps reveal minute differences between individual specimens. But such differences are like Gratiano’s three grains of wheat hid in three bushels of chaff. You may look all day ere you find them, and when you find them they are not worth the search.

Thus I vegetated on in Essex, thoughtless and unthought for, growing as any ugly duckling may grow, if chance has warmed its egg to maturity and hatched out the product. And a very ugly duckling indeed I must have been, and I know that I was dissatisfied with myself, although I had no standard of measurement ready by me, and consequently used none. Self-dissatisfaction is the beginning and essential condition of

all growth. The snail is the only living thing in favour of which nature has made an unfair exception. As the snail increases in stature, and (presumably) in favour with his brother snails, his tenement grows along him. The architect of the universe has been kinder to snails than to men.

But I had some sort of education for which I still remain devoutly grateful. Let me describe its manner and method. I was turned over to the curate of the parish. He wanted to make me learn by heart "*Propria quæ maribus.*" I absolutely rebelled. Ultimately we hit on a *via media*. It was supplied by Martyn's Georgics, a copy of which I had routed out among his books. Then between us we got hold of a natural history. The curate was astonished to discover that its author was not a naturalist, so much as a Fellow of an Oxford college, and a learned classicist. Pupil and teacher were thus on their level, and settled down to an understanding. He was to teach me the dead languages—Greek and Latin,—and I, on the other hand, was to teach him what I knew of woodcraft. Each was to be docile as pupil, and stern as master. We stuck to this compact, and as we worked it honestly it worked well. Before he and I parted company I could read Latin, if not Greek, and could even speak it. In fact, we adopted the rule of the Jesuits, and talked Latin that we might improve ourselves. He

might have asked,—“What’s o’clock?” Instead, he asked,—“*Quota hora?*” I might have wished to say,—“Time for a swim.” I used to say,—“*Natandum est.*” Thus we got on.

All that I knew of my father at this time was that he was always in money difficulties. Nor do I say this by way of blame to him. Financially, he was neither better off nor worse than other Essex squires and landlords, who were, for the most part, alike, hopelessly insolvent and impecunious. You cannot get out of your land more than it will carry. When a camel is overloaded, it remains squatting on its legs and refuses to move. Stir it will not, although you may beat it to death. The camel served under Abraham, the father of the elect, and is consequently the one animal that has taken the measure of man.

My eldest brother was hardly even a memory in the household. He had done something too dreadful to be even remembered. His name, so far as domestic formalities can go, had been blotted out from the family record. As I shall not have to deal with him again, I may as well say what was his ultimate career in life. He entered the service of the Peruvian Government, and became their chief Minister of Marine. His juvenile indiscretion, which, according to my father, unfitted him for any further useful or honourable work on the face of this earth, was not that he had made love to a

dairy-maid; but that a dairy-maid had made love to him, and had carried him off as Omphale did Hercules.

My second brother had been destined for a civil engineer, and with a view to that result had been, so to say, potted out in Victoria Street, Westminster, which, I am told, is a place where, in the course of the day, more guineas, or their equivalents, pass hands than honest words are spoken. He soon became thoroughly qualified, and was then sent to New Zealand, where, I believe, he is doing credit to his training.

I was the third son. My youngest brother was barely out of the nursery, and unequal to the performance of his matutinal bath.

My sisters in no way concerned me. There were two of them. They were gluttonous devourers of novels in three volumes. They adopted the latest fashion in dress, whatever it might be. They knew everything about everything, and they rested content in that sublime omniscience. Being, moreover, the vicegerents of the household, they enjoyed authority and exercised it.

I have not yet spoken of my mother. I shall always remember her with love. She had been the daughter of an eminent Queen's Counsel, who had made a great deal of money and was expected to die rich, as indeed he did. When my mother married he behaved liberally. He was always available for a cheque in any emergency, and when he died he left her a good round sum to be

hers for life, with remainder to her children, in equal proportions.

My father did not find it an easy thing to be a landlord. The best of his tenants paid unpunctually, others got into heavy arrears, others did not pay at all. "What are you to do?" my father used to say. "If you cannot get another tenant, you had better allow the present one to remain. He will, at all events, scratch the face of the ground, keep down the weeds and repair the hedges. He is an unsalaried bailiff, and you have your shooting over his farm for whatever it may be worth."

At times would come a pinch more than usually severe. For our meat and vegetables we relied on our own resources. But coals and groceries and clothing had to be paid for, and as you cannot pay a bill of twenty pounds with a five pound note, my mother's income had to be anticipated. As her trustees never consented to this operation, the process was an expensive one. Thus we rubbed on in a miserable kind of way, living from hand to mouth, and without much hope for the future. No man is more wretched than a needy country squire; no man so poor as a poor gentleman with appearances to keep up.

By the time I was twenty I had had my full share of such adventures as Essex can yield. I had attended fairs, ridden steeple-chases, engaged myself in personal

conflict with poachers and gipsies, and, as a matter of course, fallen desperately in love with the only heiress in the neighbourhood, not because she was an heiress, but because she happened to be good-looking—which last opinion, like the affection itself, was distinctly reciprocal.

This love affair was the first turning point in my life. Of course we wrote letters to each other—about two a day—or, if we did not meet, four or thereabouts. In the nature of things, these letters were intercepted. They were very silly and very earnest. The result of their discovery was that Isabella Vivian was packed off to a boarding-school in the Isle of Wight, and I was despatched to London to read for the Bar.

Reading for the Bar meant this:—I had the run of a pleader's chambers, to which I never went; I lodged at a boarding-house in Bayswater; I made my billiards furnish me with pocket money; I was on familiar terms with every omnibus driver on my route, and I think I can honestly state that I never missed a suburban race meeting. In this way I qualified myself to defend my fellow-creatures put upon trial for their lives, and to argue appeals involving hereditary titles and vast estates before the House of Lords.

Let me, on the other hand, do myself just. Honestly, I do not believe that I had any vices. I never drank more than I could carry. I never borro

money which I did not promptly repay. I never made a bet on a certainty, or insulted a man smaller than myself; and I treated all women with reverence. With these exceptions I was no doubt as idle and worthless a young vagabond as any in town.

CHAPTER II.

THE boarding-house, for sharing in all the privileges of which, including the *entrée* to the billiard room and the use of the piano, I paid the modest sum of thirty shillings a week, was in the semi-aristocratic district of Bayswater, which looks down upon Paddington, and is itself looked down upon by South Kensington. It was kept by a widow, who must once have been good-looking, but who now was worried and overworked, and never weary of discoursing about her troubles, past and present.

The company was distinctly mixed. There were two gentlemen, who were each something in the city—what it might be I never inquired. There was another whom I knew to be a bookmaker, but not a member of Tattersall's. There was a half-pay officer, a brevet-lieutenant-colonel, a clerk from Somerset House, and a gentleman of the press. As for the ladies, they too were a little mixed. There was a general's widow, who spoke with a rich Irish accent, and always referred to her husband on every possible opportunity as "The Djineral." There were two grass widows, whose husbands were said to

be serving in India; but there was some sort of difficulty in ascertaining the regiments to which these gallant officers belonged, a fact of which Mrs. General very spitefully made the most. There was a Miss M'Lachlan, who boasted much of her nephew "*The M'Lachlan*." She dressed severely, had an obtrusive nose, and was an extreme Calvinist, regarding all forms of episcopacy as being little better than the Scarlet Woman herself. Lastly, there was a Mrs. Brabazon, who might have been an age between twenty-five and thirty-five, and whom all the other women hated, partly because she dressed better than they did, having all her frocks from Paris, partly because she was very good-looking, and all the men were in love with her, and partly because she allowed herself luxuries, such as a pint of champagne with her dinner, and occasionally hothouse fruit, while in the matter of flowers she was positively reckless, managing to procure them from Nice when they were not to be had in London at any price.

At the end of a week Mrs. Brabazon and I were very good friends. At the end of a fortnight I was allowed to escort her in her morning walk. After a dozen or so of these expeditions, which were usually in Kensington Gardens, I told her more or less loudly, being in earnest, that I loved her, and she replied that I was a very naughty and impudent boy to tell her so to her face.

"But I *do* love you," I said. "On my soul I do."

"You silly little cock-sparrow! I am old enough to be your mother." And she rubbed her cheek vigorously with her pocket handkerchief to show, I suppose, that its roses were genuine. "If you dare to talk any more such nonsense to me I shall order you away and go home alone. You ought to be whipped for your impertinence."

I looked rapidly round and could see no one watching us, so I boldly threw my arm round her waist and kissed her. In return, of course, I got a box on the ears, but I do not believe it could possibly have been intended to hurt me. If it was, it certainly failed.

"You are very rude. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You are hardly out of jackets, and you smell of bread and butter. I hate you overgrown boys, *dont on coupe le pain en tartines.*"

"If you are not civil to me," I replied, somewhat colloquially, "I shall do it again."

"No, pray don't," said the lady. "At least not here. For heaven's sake respect the proprieties. We shall have all the nursemaids laughing at us, and the park-keeper ordering us out."

"I shall only kiss you all the more when I get you back."

"That's your business, my young man. But perhaps if you are good you may,"

So we walked home the best of friends, and I may mention, as a mere matter of detail, that as soon as we were in the passage and the street door was shut, I kissed her then and there on the door mat a good dozen of times at least. Such were my playful ways.

A month passed rapidly, uneventfully and pleasantly. My remittances from home were extremely irregular, but I kept straight with that poor hard-worked Martha, Mrs. Jessett, and paid her as regularly as I could. Sometimes if I had had a good run at billiards I would even pay her a little in advance, telling her that otherwise I should be losing it again, and that she had better make sure of it while she had the opportunity. She used to shake her head a little over my billiards, but evidently considered me, upon the whole, a respectable young man, well behaved, and a credit, if not an ornament, to what she called her "select circle."

I was in vigorous health, and used to take enormous walks. There were a certain number of dinners to be eaten at the Temple, and these formed the staple of my legal education. I rather liked them. The wine was far from bad, and the little messes of four were most friendly *parties carrées*. I only remember one disagreeable incident occurring at any of them. A prig of a cousin of mine being afraid lest I should recognise him and probably corrupt his precious morals, folded

down the paper on which you write your name to prove your attendance, and then handed it on to the next man. He being a good-natured fellow and a sturdy, deliberately unfolded it, flattened it out, wrote his own name upon it in the largest possible fist, and handed it on to me; after which silence fell on the mess until we ordered a bottle of port, at which my worthy cousin precipitately left.

I occasionally come across this young gentleman, and were it not that I am certain he has never yet read Tom Jones, I should slap him on the back and address him as Blifil. But the shot would fall dead. What was it that the late Lord Westbury said of a corporation? "It had neither a soul to be saved nor a body to be kicked." My cousin's carcase was too worthless for kicking. His soul is his own affair. Of all hateful products of the present day, your sucking young Pharisee is about the worst.

Thus my life—except, of course, for my love affair—ran in an even and monotonous path. I could easily make enough money for all my simple amusements. Now and again I would indulge myself in the luxury of a good long ride with a quiet dinner at some old-fashioned hotel. Then I am afraid my tastes, or at all events some of them, must have been barbaric, for I discovered an old-fashioned riverside house at Chelsea

where the bargemen used to play quoits and skittles for pots of beer. I am particularly fond of skittles. It is a vulgar game, no doubt, but it is admirable exercise on a wet day, and I remember reading somewhere that when Peter the Great worked as a shipwright at Deptford, he could not only fight any man in the whole place, but was also much addicted to skittles, the simplicity of the game and its roughness pleasing his barbaric fancy. As a matter of fact, I know a learned judge now on the bench who is very partial to skittles, and makes no secret of the fact, and a skittle alley is one of the many resources of Marlborough House.

To conclude, I found that the bulk of my fellow students and of the junior Bar were most excellent and estimable fellows, and I made a number of friendships, which aided materially to make my life pleasant. Need any man have been happier?

Nor must I forget Mrs. Brabazon. Sometimes I would catch a favourable tide and row her up to Richmond, when we would dine at the dear old Castle, and return by train. We made all kinds of happy little excursions together—to Ham House, to Hampton Court, with its galleries and gardens, to the Lion at Farningham, where we would probably fish all day with indifferent luck or none, and dine pleasantly by an open window, richly festooned with roses and honeysuckle. Nothing pleased her so much as to go to a new place;

and nothing pleased me so much as discovering a new place to which to take her. We were as happy as children and—so far as I can see—about as innocent. It pleased us to lead our own lives in our own way, and if that is sin, as Miss M'Lachlan expressed her strong conviction it was ("thoroughly carnal" is what she called it), I can only say that it is extremely pleasant, and that I am very sorry for those who have never tried it. There are some people who, I really believe, would, if they could, stop the birds from singing on Sunday, and confine the bright-eyed rabbits strictly to their burrows during the hours of Divine worship; and Miss M'Lachlan was of this type, taking things austere-ly, and paying strict tithe of her mint and anise and cum-min, while serenely indifferent to the weightier matters of the law.

There were occasional skirmishes at the dinner-table between the Scotch spinster and Mrs. Brabazon, in which the latter had so much the best of it that, on one occasion, Miss M'Lachlan, to the relief of everybody, and the unconcealed merriment of Mr. Brattle, the jolly old bookmaker, burst into tears and left the room. Mr. Brattle summed up the merits of the dispute judicially, tersely, and vigorously, and confirmed his opinion by offering to lay ten to one against the old cat with maiden allowance and weight for age. He found no takers; but he was sufficiently tickled with his own


joke to console him for the loss of what he called giving a little lively interest to the thing.

Bookmakers, like Jews, are of many types, but a good-hearted bookmaker, like a good-hearted Jew, is one of the very best of fellows.

CHAPTER III.

FORTUNE was not always favourable to me. Billiards has less chance in it than any game in the world; but even at billiards there is such a thing as a persistent run of luck against you, and I remember one day reaching what Mr. Micawber would have called a "climax in my misfortunes." I had no money. My father was in arrears with my allowance, and I knew literally no one to whom to apply, so I dressed myself with more than usual care, paying particular attention to my boots, and marched round to the establishment of Mr. Raphael in Half-moon Street, Piccadilly.

Now, Mr. Raphael was a money-lender, and made no secret of the fact. There was a neat brass plate on the front door, and an office bell with a small plate underneath it. I was shown into a waiting-room, magnificently furnished with exquisite paintings and statuettes and valuable china. Mr. Raphael's taste was apparently as sound as his judgment. Admitted to his sanctum, I was not long in coming to business. I wanted a hundred pounds, and I told Mr. Raphael so. He scrutinised me very carefully, and I returned the compliment. He



was most unmistakably a Hebrew, but one of a high type. He was plainly dressed, and had not even a diamond ring, and his hands, physically at any rate, were small, white, and clean.

He soon ascertained that I had a small reversion on the death of my mother.

"Very well, Mr. Severn," he said, "you must give me a charge on that, which my solicitor, Mr. Jacobs, will prepare. I suppose it's not charged already?"

"Certainly not," I answered. "I have never thought of it. How soon can I have the money?"

"Well, Mr. Jacobs must make inquiries. I suppose you are in a hurry."

I replied most emphatically that I was.

"Well, if things turn out right, as I daresay they will, you can have it at one o'clock the day after tomorrow."

"And meantime you can let me have a ten-pound note?"

"I think you're honest, Mr. Severn. Yes, I think you may be trusted with a ten-pound note."

So he produced two five-pound notes, for which I gave him an I O U, and he also produced a pint of very excellent dry champagne and a box of cigars.

"You have never asked me, by the way," he observed, "what I am going to charge you for this hundred, nor told me how long you want it."

I blushed scarlet. He was taking my measure so provokingly.

"Beggars mustn't be choosers," I said. "You will make your own terms, I suppose."

"Well, I shall charge you twenty pounds, and take your bill at three months. At the end of that time I shall probably renew if you are going on steadily, which I shall make it my business to find out. By the way, are you in any profession?"

"I am about to be called to the Bar," I replied.

"Ah, well! I wish you luck. But it's horribly overstocked, and the barristers, as far as I can see, are all cutting one another's throats. I'd sooner, for your own sake, you were anything else. If, at the end of your first five years, you have paid your expenses, you will be doing uncommonly well. And, let me tell you that, as a rule, I don't touch a barrister with a pair of tongs. You must marry a solicitor's daughter. Jacobs has one who would just do for you. She's not exactly a beauty, and she's got a devil of a temper. But there's plenty of her for the money, for she can't ride an ounce under sixteen stone. You might do worse; you might indeed. Think it over."

I laughed, and told him I would, and the next moment his clerk entered.

"Well, Mason, what is it?"

"Colonel Pierce, sir."

"Very well, then. I sha'n't see him. Tell him so."

"He says he has two other names, sir, and he's brought the paper with him. They're good names, sir."

"That's another matter. Let him wait half-an-hour and then show him in. Good morning, Mr. Severn. Mason, show Mr. Severn out."

So I shook hands with Mr. Raphael, and departed not altogether unfavourably impressed by him.

Get out of your head the idea that a money-lender is of necessity an unclean beast, and if he is a Jew you will probably find him a decent fellow, with a far higher sense of honour than the great bulk of his customers. I prefer him to a solicitor, any day; and I believe in the long run he is cheaper. Solicitors have swallowed up more estates and ruined more families than have any number of money-lenders.

Here the attorney dwells in county state,
With his twelve acres and his park-like gate;
But wait awhile, if times become more dark,
His neighbour's woes will buy his gate a park.

It is very seldom that a money-lender makes a large fortune. It is very seldom, overstocked as the trade is, that a solicitor dies poor.

Armed with my ten pounds I hurried home, and as some instinct had forewarned me would be the case, found Mrs. Brabazon in.

"What is the matter with you, Jack? You seem

flushed with delight. Don't tell me of any *bonnes fortunes*, for I won't listen to them. You've been winning again at billiards, I'm sure."

"No, I haven't; but I have had a stroke of luck all the same. Let us dine and go to the theatre."

"Yes, I will, if you will dine reasonably, like a good boy, and sit quietly in the stalls afterwards. I must have no wasting of money."

The bargain was struck and ratified. We dined—never mind where, I will name no particular place—for the usual half-guinea, with one bottle of well-iced champagne between us. Then we sat most decorously in the stalls, taking, I suppose, about as much interest in the performance as did anyone else. We left before the farce, and I purchased a veil in Coventry Street, under cover of which Mrs. Brabazon came with me to the Café de l'Europe, where we took a modest supper.

There was really, as I almost believe I have remarked before, something childlike, and to that extent innocent, in our simple methods of making ourselves happy. And then we drove back to the boarding-house, my companion insisting that I should get out at the corner of the street, and allow the cab to deposit her at the door alone. It would not have done to have followed too soon, so I adjourned to a neighbouring hostel, where I sat for a while with the landlord in

his own bar parlour, ultimately obtaining my admission to the select boarding-house with my own latch-key.

I am not going to multiply details of these *folles journées*. It is certain that I was madly in love. It is equally certain that my devotion pleased Mrs. Brabazon. I often wonder how it was I did not marry her, but I think I see an answer to the question in her own sound common sense, and better even than that, in her honesty and loyalty. Her common sense told her that she was older than myself, and that our relations had better remain such as they were for so long as they might; that we might thus, if the summer blossom of love fell off the tree, at all events secure the autumn fruit of friendship. And, honestly, I think that Susan Brabazon valued my friendship more than my love, and that when she first commenced to encourage me it was rather *pour se désennuyer* than for any other reason. And also, without being a puppy or vain, I think I may say that she was proud of me, and wanted to see me do something in life, and then turn round upon those who had ill-treated me and cold-shouldered me.

We men are never astonished because a man of fifty-five falls in love with a big school-girl of seventeen. We do not think of the life to which the poor child is to be condemned for what ought to be the best and brightest years of her own. No! the old greys solemnly wag their heads, and say that it has

been a very suitable and fortunate match. Why should it not be an equally suitable and fortunate combination of circumstances for a woman of middle age to take under her wing a stripling young enough by all laws of nature to be her son? You will answer, "Oh yes, we have heard all this before. You are making out your own case." Well! and is it not the duty of every man to make out his own case? And is there anything new under the sun?

Looking back at all these things now, I marvel at my own luck in a very different spirit from that in which Clive, after looting lakh upon lakh of rupees, marvelled at his own moderation, and drew comparisons between himself on the one hand, and Cortes and Pizarro on the other, not at all favourable to those two eminent buccaneer adventurers.

In her infinite moderation and genuine tenderness of womanly sympathy, Mrs. Brabazon watched over me, but would do nothing more. I firmly believe that, at any moment of our friendship, or more than friendship, she would have been better pleased than any one else to have seen me marry happily and well, and would have done everything in her power to bring about such a match if she had espied time, place and opportunity.

Prudes, and moralists, who are often worse than prudes, may think what they please of her conduct. To me it seems "pure womanly."

CHAPTER IV.

At the appointed date I made my second visit to Mr. Raphael, who received me in a manner at once friendly and benignant. He was satisfied, he said, with the security, and would let me have the money I required. Mr. Jacobs had prepared the necessary documents, and they were waiting for me, but perhaps I would like to read them through before I signed them.

I had a very fair general ignorance of law, and of conveyancing law the most profound ignorance in the world. Besides, I wanted to have my money and to get away with it. So I signed a promissory note for one hundred and twenty pounds, receiving back my I O U for ten pounds and a cheque for ninety.

"I have not deducted the professional charges of Mr. Jacobs," observed my guide, philosopher, and friend. "I will satisfy those myself. You will perhaps be coming to me again. I should be glad to see you at any time within reasonable limits—both as to time, that is to say, and as to amounts."

Why! Here seemed an indefinite vista of golden

caverns open before me. I felt myself as by some touching of the lamp a second Aladdin, and the blood rushed to my face.

"You will come and lunch with me, I hope," I asked my new Mæcenæas.

"You are very kind. I dare not lunch. My digestion is entirely ruined. I live by doctors' rule, and principally on rice puddings and Steinwein. Good-bye. Let me give you a word of advice before you go. If you want any more ready come back to me. Don't go to anybody else. I should hear of it if you did. I should then have to secure myself, by telling your trustees all about our relations, which would not, I should imagine, be at all pleasant for you. Besides, I could put a *distringas* on you. You know what that means?"

I blushed, and replied that I did not.

"Go back to your Inn of Court and ask some of your friends. But there, you're a gentleman, Mr. Severn, and will do nothing underhand with me, I am sure. I am busy now. Go to the mint."

I went away to "the mint," or, in other words, to the West End branch of the Bank of England, and there converted my cheque into solid cash. The West End branch being at a corner of Burlington Gardens, I made my way to the arcade of the same name, where I plunged a bit in trifles for Mrs. Brabazon, making

also a few additions to my own toilette. I was "combed and curled" until I looked, as Tennyson has it, like any

"Oiled and curled Assyrian bull."

There is, a little below the Burlington (which I did not leave without a fan, and gloves, and a sun-shade), a famous fruiterer's shop looking south. Here I procured nectarines. The nectarine is the very finest fruit in the world, but it comes late in the season.

Then my driver carted me back to Bayswater, taking Tattersall's as he went, that, under the pretence of watering his horse, he might glean, or attempt to glean, the latest odds. The good nature of youth is always exuberant. When I got out I gave him a shilling cigar and two shillings more than his fare. I believe he fancied that I was under misapprehension as to the exact sum chargeable, and wanted to escape dispute by the offer of the regalia, for he received both the gratuity in cash and the gratuity in kind without the least attempt to wear out the brim of his hat, and whipped away his horse as if he were glad to be rid of me.

Dinner was in full preparation when I entered the passage, and Mrs. Brabazon was in what we called the reception-room up to five and the dining-room after that hour. It was just five, and a dirty and trowsled maid-

servant was beginning to spread upon the table a dinner cloth three days old.

"You're incorrigible. You're going into training for running a race and carrying weight. You are loaded up like an argosy. Are your father and brothers dead, and have you come into the family estates?"

"Not a bit of it. I had just the tail end of my patrimony, and I have sold it all for a mess of pottage. Not a bad mess either, as things go."

"You have been doing something foolish?"

"And what if I have?"

"Why, that you had better not stop in this inner circle of sweltering mud and pitch, and drink bad beer, and worse Marsala, and begin to talk about it. You must take me out to-night. Come along with me. I order you. You do not want any brandy or soda, nor even sal volatile, although I have some."

I followed her some way up the stairs, and then, like a great schoolboy, as I still was, hesitated again. She stamped her little foot on the floor.

"Come up!" she said. So I went up with her to her own room.

I followed her in submissively. The room was a small sitting-room, and my first proceeding was to deposit all my packages and parcels on the table. Then, without invitation, I sat down in a large wicker-work chair. She, without a word, drew another chair out

a right angle, so that she could catch, as I know now, the exact profile of my features and detect their expression. Then she began.

"I repeat what I told you downstairs. I told you there that you were a silly boy. Now, I tell you, having got you all alone to myself, that you're much worse. You're as bad as a fourth-form boy at a public school. You are perfectly incapable of taking care of yourself. What on earth have you been doing?"

"I want a brandy and soda," I pleaded, "and then I can tell you."

"You want nothing of the sort, any more than I want rubies in this ham and beef shop, where, if I wore them, the other women would congratulate me on the magnificent size of my garnets. Now, be a good boy; pour yourself out a glass of water, and light yourself a cigarette. I know you have got cigarettes about you, as certain as if I had been with you when you were buying them. I am ashamed of myself for taking you out the other night, and getting you into mischief. When you have lit your cigarette you may tell me everything."

Then she left her chair and drew a hassock up close by me. Then she held my hand in hers, turned her face full towards mine, and waited for me to begin.

"Well," I said, with considerable disquietude. "I have been out getting money. That is all. And I

have only spent a little of it; and I have all the rest with me."

"Good boy, so far. I know what getting money means. I know you have had to pay for it. It is the dearest thing in this world. Well, I will forgive you that. What else have you been doing?"

"Shopping. I have been to the Burlington, and one or two other places, and have come straight back."

There was a silence for a moment, during which we looked steadily at each other.

"You have only been shopping?" she asked.

"I assure you, Susan, only shopping. I have some debts still left to pay. And besides, I wanted some more, to go on with. Why! I know I play billiards, but I have not a bet standing over in the world, although I have not paid a single one to-day. You don't understand my billiards, Susan. It's as harmless with me as lawn-tennis. I can't help winning at it, although I go out of my way to handicap myself."

She sprang to her feet, and began to pace up and down the room. I was astonished for the first time to see her excited. I, for my own part, conscious of no more wrong than is a schoolboy who has plucked an overhanging apple, and jerked out a trout with a foul cast of his minnow, was perfectly unabashed. It seemed to me that she was making an unnecessary fuss about matters which, after all, were entirely my own,

so I waited with such philosophy as belongs to a man of my age.

"We'll talk no more business at present," she suddenly said. "You shall take me out again to-night to some nice quiet place, somewhere where there will be nothing to jar upon us or annoy us, or make us feel at all like our real selves. You stop here. I'll just run upstairs and put on my things. Never mind the people. We'll go out together. What need we care, after all, for such *canaille*, either you or I? Poor creatures! They have nothing to do but to talk scandal. The cackling idiots! Now wait. I will take the greatest care to look a credit to you."

She ran upstairs, and in a very short time came down again, looking certainly marvellous. I do not think that it was in the least my own intemperate tone that fanned my admiration. I firmly believe that nine men out of ten would have agreed with me. She had put on a little walking-dress of dark grey silk, cut in the plainest possible fashion. Her cuffs and collar were plain white linen; her gloves dark lavender. Her bonnet was small, close fitting, and fastened without strings. Its only ornament was a Marshal Niel rosebud. She had a dark jacket of fleecy wool, evidently made by a good tailor, and a little sunshade too large for a parasol and too small for a genuine umbrella.

"It's too early for some things, Jack, at present,

and it's too late for others—too late in the day, and too late in the year. Let us go and dine somewhere quietly first—at some decent place, and yet not too dull.”

To suggest a place that was decent and respectable, and yet not too dull, was beyond the range of my experience, and I frankly told her as much.

“Then leave it to me.”

She took me to an hotel which is in the district of St. James's. It is an hotel which has an open coffee-room, with dinner set and *à la carte*. It was a handsome room, with nothing about it of the restaurant, or in any way garish. On the contrary, it was painted in sober colours, and lit for the most part by wax candles. It was distinctly English.

“I shall order the dinner and the wine and everything,” she said. “You shall see what infinite capabilities there are in me of great things as soon as the wind begins to blow from the gates of the West.”

I am not writing the menu of that little dinner from memory. It was written on a dainty card, which I carried away, and which I still treasure. If my reader thinks me a Brillat Savarin, he is mistaken; but I recall this dinner because it was the occasion, or rather the pretence, of its surroundings, circumstances, and conditions. We had oysters, spring soup, sole au vin blanc, cutlets *à la Soubise*, a partridge, salad, an

omelette, rice pudding, grapes, and Parmesan biscuits. The only wine was still hock, which made its appearance with the oysters, and after it thoroughly-iced champagne of '68 Perrier Jouet. I am content to leave this menu to the judgment of those who understand those things better than myself.

It is but a short drive from where we dined to that London attempt at a Trocadero, the Alhambra. There we went and took a small private box, where I could smoke and Susan could enjoy a cup of black coffee and a glass of chartreuse.

The Alhambra that night gave us its usual choice, or, to be more exact, variety. There were star singers—not perhaps with all that talent which is only to be found in Paris, but certainly better than anything of their kind to be met with in London. The irrepressible Jones may not be the equal of Paulus or Libert, but he is very good in his way when he does his best. Then there were the acrobats, and English acrobats are admittedly the best in the world, as are English boxers, having more muscle and more stolid indifference to danger than have their Continental confrères. Then, too, there was the ballet. The Alhambra ballets fall short of the Parisian in gorgeousness of costume and scenery, and although we import our *premières danseuses*, our corps de ballet is never so well trained as it would be in France or Italy. It is the great fault of England

to recklessly waste good raw material instead of training it to the utmost. But then no one in England—not even the Bishop of London—seriously regards the ballet as a profession.

When we emerged I called a cab, giving the man instructions as before to put me down in advance, and then to deposit Mrs. Brabazon at the door. As it was probably his last chance of another fare that night, he drove slowly, economising his horse for the morrow.

“You have been to the Jews, you bad boy,” Susan said, as soon as the horse had settled down to his steady jolt, and we were clear of the noisiest of the traffic.

“Well, and what if I have? It’s my own business.”

“Not entirely your own business, for I, at any rate, care for you sufficiently to tell you that anything that stood in the way of the future before you would make the remainder of my own life dark with its shadow. Come! There is nothing incurable except dishonour, of which you are incapable. Tell me all about it.”

CHAPTER V.

I OBEYED her commands, and told her "all about it" as well as I could. The narrative was imperfect, with the exception of the figures, which, of course, I remembered accurately. When I had finished she took my right hand into her left and patted it gently with her other hand.

"Have you really told me the whole truth? Have you kept back nothing whatever? Please don't mislead me or I will never ask you to trust me again."

"On my honour, Susan, I have told you everything, down to the last farthing."

"Very well then. Do not take a single other step in this wretched matter without asking me first. Of course you are tied up for a while and, so, safe. I fancy you will find it is easier to get into the net than to cut your way out, but we will see what we can do. And now let us talk of something else."

So we talked of something else, until it became time, as before, to arrange with the cabman and to manœuvre our separate entry. When I returned, after some fifteen minutes of solitude and reflection, I found

the house in darkness. That I slept soundly goes without saying.

Mrs. Brabazon did not appear at breakfast next morning, and so, when the meal was concluded, I took my way towards the river, which I managed to strike, and availed myself of the steamboat for the best approach to a blow of air which London can give you, unless you resort to such out-of-the-way places as Primrose Hill.

The boat landed me at Temple Pier. My pleader was apparently indifferent to my absence. At all events he made no comment upon it, but after remarking that it was a fine day for the time of year, handed me a set of interrogatories to draw and to leave for his approval, on the back of which he had pencilled certain weird and illegible references to "Adolphus and Ellis," "Petheram on Interrogatories," and "Meeson and Welby." Into these I plunged, if not quite *con amore*, at any rate with the distinct feeling that they were a change. When I had finished them, and had been graciously assured that they were extremely creditable, I sallied out into the garden.

The day was still young, and it was my first impulse to go back, on the strength of having done a virtuous day's work, and to try and tempt Mrs. Brabazon out again; but she had managed to make me, in a certain sense, afraid of her, and my love for her war

not altogether of the kind that casteth out fear, however perfect it may otherwise have been. So I found my way to some billiard rooms in Holborn, where I set to work at pool, backing myself wherever I could get the chance. The stakes were not high; but if you win, or even take stroke and divide a pool of twenty four, now and then judiciously betting upon your stroke, it is not difficult to collect a couple of sovereigns. And with about this sum I left the rooms at an early hour and walked home, feeling myself a pattern of all the virtues, and full of the most vague and tempestuous hopes.

I would get called to the Bar, and would burst upon it like a meteor. I would keep a yacht and cruise in it during the long vacation with Mrs. Brabazon. I would go into Parliament (actually at this moment I did not know whether I was a Tory, Whig, Liberal, Radical, or Home Ruler); and then came hazy ideas, as if through some dim arch, of the woolsack and of a peerage. *Si jeunesse savait! Si vieillesse pouvait!*

Next day I was in no humour for work in any form, and least of all for work at my pleader's chambers. I had passed through a cyclone, and was in what sailors call "the doldrums." In a cyclone the wind catches you from every quarter at once. In the doldrums there is no wind to catch you from any

quarter at all, and you consequently lie "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean." I was, I say, at this moment in the doldrums.

In this frame of mind I wrote a little note asking Susan to come for a walk, sent it up and received a verbal reply that she would be ready immediately. We strolled together into the Grove, and so made our way into Kensington Gardens, full, as usual, of soldiers, nursemaids, children, babies, and loafers.

We sat down close by the water under an immense elm. The leaves were falling already, and the trees were turning russet. Kensington Gardens are still a paradise of birds. Swallows were even yet flitting overhead. One could hear the plaintive note of the wood-pigeon, and now and again a shy, shy little nut hatch would dart about over the bark, hanging, in its parrot-fashion, head downwards, darting its neck to this side and that, and peering with its tiny inquisitive eyes for vagrant insects. In Kensington Gardens nobody is suspicious or captious. Nobody cares who is walking with whom. We were as entirely alone as if we had been in the very heart of a tropical forest.

I began to talk with but indifferent success, and had an uneasy suspicion that she was enjoying my perplexity. This made me more or less desperate, and at last I came to the conclusion that I was driven into a corner and had better at once open fire. There i

grimly humorous proverb which recommends you, as "the eleventh commandment with promise," to tell a lie and stick to it. It seemed to me that telling the truth was not only the right thing for me to do, but, under all the circumstances, the best. I do not of course mean the best from any low or unworthy point of view—my past history will, I hope, acquit me of any such suggestion. I merely mean that I wanted to bring matters to a head, and consequently set to work in my own blundering fashion to do so.

"Look here, Susan," I suddenly broke out.

"Look at what, my dear boy?"

"Oh, don't turn all my earnest into fun. Take me seriously."

"I always do take you seriously. I have never deceived or even misled you for a moment."

"Well, then, I want you to marry me. I want you to do so out of kindness to me and pity for me. I will get called, and we will go away somewhere to the Colonies, and I will practise at the Colonial bar, where they like young men, and where I really think I shall be sure to get on. We shall meet nobody whom we know—nobody to worry us or give us any trouble or make things in any way unpleasant. It is difficult to imagine a simpler and a more complete change of life. It will be a transformation effected in about six weeks with no more trouble than that involved in a very plea-

sant run in a magnificent steamer; and we will be married before we start."

"The world moves, Jack. I remember when young men used to build castles in the air. You are not content unless you map out empires and dynasties in it."

"De l'audace! De l'audace! Toujours de l'audace!"
I answered.

"Everything," she answered, "even a correct French accent, will come to a young man in time, if he will only have sufficient self-control to wait."

"Wait!" I echoed, angrily. "Wait! It is always the same answer. Wait! Wait till the spring; wait till the full summer; wait till the autumn. I am tired of waiting, and I will wait no longer. One may wait till one's hair is grey, and at the waiting game death, who waits the longest and is its croupier, sweeps the board. I, for my part, shall wait no longer. I have, so far perhaps, made a mistake of life; but the mistake is not at all irretrievable. Anything but it; and it is just my quiet but fixed determination to commence life over again. I have opened out badly, made the wrong *gambit*; but I have still some confidence in myself, and I mean to begin all over again. My old age, if I ever reach it, shall not be a regret."

"I am not talking of myself, Jack. On the contrary, I am talking in earnest. It is idle for you

think of marrying me, and it would be worse than idle in me to encourage you in any such notion. You do not know all about me."

"I do."

"Oh, dear me; no, you do not—not in the very least. I have a very bad record; and, apart altogether from that, I am idle, selfish, and incurably extravagant. I should hold you in a fool's paradise for a month or two, and then some morning you would find yourself left alone, with the additional mortification of knowing upon the very best authority that I had gone away with someone else. I am far too fond of you to see you subjected to this kind of thing, and I will be no party to anything whatever that leads up to it, however remotely or indirectly—of that you may rest most absolutely assured. You are a most dear, good, lovable boy. I will say, if you wish it, dear, good, lovable man. And it is for that very reason that I mean to protect you against yourself. And now, Jack, I am thoroughly tired. I always did hate arguments. Take me back to the Grove, and give me some ices. And for another week, at all events, during which time you will perhaps come to your senses, there must not be another word of all this nonsense."

Of course I could only obey, although I felt quite are that I did so with a very sulky grace; and in s frame of mind I escorted Mrs. Brabazon to West-

bourne Grove. There we had our ices and a little fruit, and a harmless pint of claret with a syphon of soda water. The entertainment was given in its simplicity, and at its conclusion she insisted on walking home alone.

"You may go and play billiards," she said; "that is a game at which you will not singe your poor little wings."

I do not know whether this was meant as a sneer or not; but it was too dangerously like one to at all improve my temper.

"Souvent femme varie,
Bien folle qui s'y fie."

So I muttered to myself as I strode away in quest of Calverley's *virides sed non e gramine mensas*.

CHAPTER VI.

I DID not have my usual fortune, thereby directly contradicting the old saying "Unlucky in love, lucky at play." I missed easy strokes, which for me ought to have been a certainty. I left myself perversely in the very centre of the table. Ultimately I got disgusted, and walked away the winner by only some two or three shillings. The marker added fuel to the fire by suggesting, in a friendly undertone, that my nerves were a little shaky, and advising what he called a peg of brown brandy and green curaoa. I was then, and always have been, a temperate man; but I am assured by veterans in the other camp, that brown brandy and curaoa in even moderate doses would kill a rhinoceros in a week.

The next morning I rose early, wrote a note to Mrs. Brabazon, telling her I should return at twelve, and, without waiting for breakfast, walked into the park. I struck due south until I reached the river. There were some barges lying on the shore, with the bargemen and about them. In an indolent mood I invited these worthies to partake of beer at my expense. Be-

tween them they consumed about a gallon, and I remember playing one aged mariner a rubber of skittles, in which he came off decidedly the conqueror. The stakes were unimportant, and at the conclusion of the game I took my departure.

"If you want a run, sir, at any time," said one Polyphemus in a catskin cap, a blue guernsey, corduroys, and ankle jacks, "come to this house and ask for the Matilda and Clara. I'm always to be heard of here, and there's always a bunk in my cabin. The accommodation's limited, but it's clean, and I'll put you ashore wherever you like."

I thanked my new friend, entered his name in my pocket-book, and so departed. From Battersea to Hyde Park and across the park to Bayswater is an easy walk. I marched along at a good swinging pace, and reached home half-an-hour after my appointed time. The servant must have been looking out for me; for, as I turned my latch-key in the door, she quickly opened it and handed me a letter, retreating at once herself to the lower regions.

The envelope itself was formidable, being of the largest size known in attorney's offices, but my name upon it was in Susan's handwriting, and the seal was also her own.

I hurried up to my own room and tore the packet

open. First of all fell out the charge on my reversion, that I had given to Mr. Raphael. I looked at it in blank bewilderment, intensified when I noticed that it bore engrossed upon its back a full and absolute discharge and release. Pinned to it was my promissory note, vigorously cancelled and with the stamp cut out. So far I saw daylight. But there was a third enclosure—a letter from Susan herself. I locked the door, and then tore the letter open. I had to read it two or three times before I could believe it.

It ran upon this wise:—

September 28th, 18—

“MY OWN DEAR BOY,—I send you the papers which you were foolish enough to give Raphael, that you might waste the money upon myself. Does not one silly turn deserve another? By the time you have got this letter I shall be many miles away—in fact, altogether out of your reach, although I hope and trust we shall meet again and be as good friends as ever. You have been something very much more than a mere glimpse of sunshine in my chequered and tempestuous life.

“Whatever you do, mind and get called to the Bar as soon as possible. You will, I feel certain, find yourself thrust into an appointment almost at once, without knowing how, or why, or by whom, and you will

then have the world before you, with a fair chance of enjoying it.

"Do not go falling in love with anybody—not even with Miss M'Lachlan. You may continue to love me if you like. I shall be in Paris, to-morrow, and will send you thence my photograph.

"I shall not answer any of your letters, but you may write to me if you care to do so. My solicitor, Mr. Amos Clarke, of the Old Jewry, will forward your letters; but he will not give you my address, and his clerks do not know it. Be good and take care of yourself, and some day you shall hear from me again.
—Ever yours,

"SUSAN BRABAZON."

I thrust the letter into my pocket, and hurried rapidly into the streets. Striking to the northward across the park, I reached the canal, the towing path of which in the daytime is practically deserted. Here I paced up and down to consider this letter.

Evidently Susan was determined, for the present at any rate, to hide herself from me, and it would be idle, unless I had large funds at my disposal, to attempt to track her out. A mere journey to Paris, for instance, on the chance of finding her there, would have been worse than useless. She might be at Vienna, Venice, Biarritz, Rome, anywhere. And even if she were in

Paris, how was I to find her out? Advertising in the papers was useless. It would annoy her, and besides, her solicitor had her address. There was nothing to be done, except to bow to fate with a bad grace. This I did, cursing my luck, and then, *more anglico*, proceeded to stupefy myself at a hostel, known as the York and Albany, with London stout and a clay pipe.

In the tavern in question is, or was at that time, a taproom, frequented by cabmen and the drivers and conductors of omnibuses. Here I sought a refuge, and before long found myself with no underhand intention listening to the general conversation.

"Well," continued an omnibus driver, dividing his attention impartially between his bread and cheese, his beer and certain complicated structural alterations in the lash of his whip, "what does Bill do? Did 'e drown hisself? Not likely. 'E thought better of it. 'She never told lies before,' says Bill to himself. 'As likely as not she's telling the truth this 'ere show. So I shall 'old on,' he says, 'I shall 'old on.' And so he did 'old on for two mortal years."

And here the narrator buried his features in his pewter pot.

"And I suppose the young woman married some other bloke?" inquired a young conductor of dandified dress, with a white hat and a penny flower in his button-hole.

"You're always sharp, you are, Joe, and I dessay you're sharp enough, if you're up to only half yer own estimate o' yourself. But for onst yer 'appen to be wrong. Three months after that very identical young man was riding home beside me on my near side when a young woman on the roof leans over and touches 'im on the shoulder. 'E gives a sort o' yell, and scrambles on to the roof. It were more flyin' than scramblin'. And then 'e were by her in broad daylight, with 'is arm round 'er waist a huggin' 'er like mad, till I 'ad to ask 'im to stow it, as it was becomin' jest a trifle too 'ot and public like."

"And what then?" inquired the sceptic.

"What then?" was the contemptuous reply. "What then? Why, what on earth do you think? Why, they was married that day week! 'E'd 'ad the banns out all the time, only she never knew it, through not goin' to church o' Sundays, whereby she lost the information. And I don't believe 'e'd ever 'is eye off of 'er. But look 'ere; time's up."

And he finished his beer and hurried out.

I strolled out again over the bridge into the Regent's Park, and sauntered down to Portland Road Station. Hard by the station the road strikes due south for Oxford Street. I followed it, and then made my way through Soho Square and Soho to

Piccadilly Circus. I could not bear the idea of dining at Bayswater, so I contented myself with a steak and a pint of stout at Stone's, after which I went to the pit of the Adelphi, where was being enacted a melodrama of the genuine old Adelphi type, followed, of course, by a screaming farce. Then, the performance concluded, I sallied out and loitered home.

The next morning I called on Mr. Raphael, who this time received me with promptitude, but with some signs of astonishment. When I told him that I had not come this time to borrow money, he was more astonished still, and asked me, not rudely but still brusquely, what I *had* come for.

This I explained to him as well as I could. I told him that I wished to know under what circumstances his claim upon me had been settled.

"Easily enough," he said. "A lady came here; I daresay you know who she is. She said she was a member of your family, and I only hope, for your sake, you've more of them. She paid me up, took the bit of stiff and the parchment skins, and then gave me a regular good jacketing,—let me have it hot, I can tell you; called me all the names she could lay her tongue to. When I suggested a biscuit and a pint of dry, I really believe I was as near having my eyes clawed out

as I ever wish to be again. However, the notes were all right, and I did the proper thing and handed her back the papers. But I tell you one thing, Mr. Severn, I mean to keep my word to her. There's no more truck between you and me. That's straight."

"I'm sorry the lady was so hard on you, Mr. Raphael," I replied, hardly able to control my amusement. "I myself shall always consider that you have behaved most fairly and kindly to me."

"Well, Mr. Severn, business is business. People chuck stones at my line of business, but they can't chuck stones at the way in which I carry it on. I'm not afraid of any Equity Judge on the bench, though they've all got their knives into me. Lots of my transactions have been ripped up, but they've always stood the light, and Jacobs has pocketed his little bill of costs every time. It isn't every banker in the City of London who can say as much as that. Will you have a pint of champagne? No? Well, if you won't, have a cigar at all events. Good morning, and good luck to you, Mr. Severn. Mason, show Mr. Severn out."

So I made my way down into Piccadilly, and walked back to Bayswater more at sea than ever. But on two things I had made up my mind. Nothing should induce me to get into debt again. And, in the second place, I would get "called" as soon as possible.

That would be the best return for her kindness that I could make at present. She would almost certainly write to congratulate me on my call, and I could then go to her at once, or at all events set to work with a light heart to find her out.

These good resolutions did not go the way of most of their kind, and find their way into a pavement which only Dante could describe. I did not content myself with making them, but I also stuck to them. My course of life now became tedious and uneventful. I ate my dinners and attended my pleader's chambers with commendable regularity. I passed my examinations, and was duly called. And thereat my father so far departed from his usual rule of strict economy as to send me a cheque for a hundred pounds, and to inform me that my allowance would now be raised to a hundred and fifty a year, which would be paid me as before, quarterly. He also suggested that I should come down for Christmas. There were still some pheasants left, and there would probably be good skating on the lake, which had already caught over once or twice.

I replied to this epistle in a proper spirit of filial gratitude; settled my account at the boarding-house; took leave of Mrs. Jessett, of Miss M'Lachlan, and of the other boarders; and then, before going home, ran

down to Brighton, that I might divide a week between the harriers and the racket court.

The air of Brighton seems to act upon Londoners in a really marvellous fashion, and before a couple of days were over, I felt myself once again a boy of eighteen.

CHAPTER VII.

IN this frame of mind I made my way home. A country has delights and pleasures of its own, even if you do not, as did I in this case, know every inch of its grounds. Three years' absence may alter yourself, but they do not alter the face of nature. There were the same trees in the long avenue. The very hole from which I had taken the nest of the great red woodpecker had not been covered over with sheet lead, and, as my fly drove past, an old woodpecker darted out with a noisy shriek and chuckle, and scudded away across the park. The lake was unaltered, except by its margin one or two immemorial willows must either have tumbled down from extreme old age or else have been mercifully relieved the trouble of further existence. In the immense elms by its side the herons were still clustered, and I could recognise some of the old nests, which I had often attempted to reach at imminent risk of my neck. The rabbits were darting about in and under the bracken, and as we neared the house I heard again the solemn chatter of the rooks upon the terrace lms.

My arrival had been expected, and I found the family drawn up to receive me. My father, *en grand seigneur*, shook hands, complimented me on my growth, and expressed his satisfaction that I had at last embarked upon a career which could, of course, only end in the woolsack.

My mother kissed me, and told me that I was growing, and that I reminded her very much of her own eldest brother Horace, especially about the hair and the bridge of the nose, with regard to which last feature she could have taken me for Horace himself. Then my sisters in succession, by seniority, administered flabby, pecky kisses, popping their great red lips down on to my cheek, and snapping them away again as suddenly as if I were a dish of snap-dragon, or were suffering from some unpleasant contagious malady. My youngest brother, who had by this time attained the dignity of jackets, sidled up and took my hand, rubbed it all over his face and head, and then continued to hold it firmly.

I was asked, of course, if I would not like some refreshment. We had a room, presided over by the cook, and called in solemn make-believe the butler's pantry. I replied that I would make my way thither, and that then I should like to take a turn round the grounds, if Dick, my youngest brother, could accompany me. To this suggestion no opposition whatever was

offered. In fact, my proposal to take myself off at once and to give no further trouble, seemed to be hailed as a symptom that I had at last learned how to behave myself, and was reduced to a proper state of humility and Christian discipline.

The butler, as it pleased us to call him, was delighted. He first, without comment, drew me an immense glass of old ale. When I had finished it, he favoured me with a solemn wink while cutting a bountiful sandwich from a cold haunch of venison.

"Rare goings on you've had, Master Jack. Rare capers, I'll be bound. Well, well, let a boy begin to be a man early. That's what I say. And don't let a man begin to get an old man too soon. You're coming on, Master Jack. I'm getting old, myself. I'm bigger round the stomach than I care to be, and smaller round the thigh. 'Tisn't much I could do now, over a hurdle or across a ditch, and I ain't up to following the hounds a foot, as I did twenty years ago, when I could tire out the best horse in the field. Never mind. It does an old man good to see the young folk coming on. You won't find much change in the place. There's William down at the stables, still, and Mat too. Mat's married and got a family, and his wife, she combs his hair a bit. But she's a managing woman, and she looks after his clothes. He was a bit untidy when he was single, it's as broad as it's long. Too much beer ain't good

for a young gentleman. Try this." And he produced a quaint Dutch flagon of blue glass, with a neck like that of a stork. It was a genuine Amsterdam curaoa, and I freely confess that it warmed my blood.

Next I hunted up Dick, whom I found in all the dignity of a pea-jacket, and who at once took me under his charge. His ambition seemed to be to take me to every place at once; but I cooled down his youthful impetuosity, and told him that I wanted to go for just a stroll.

So we roamed through the grounds, which seemed to me much dilapidated, and sadly in need of replanting. And then from the stables to the kitchen garden, and from the kitchen garden to the home farm, where we kept our one cow; Dick and I wended our way to what was called the hanger—a piece of hillside thickly wooded, and noted for its badgers, squirrels and jays. I had more than won Dick's heart by the present of a big, three-bladed knife with a swivel and chain, by which it might be conveniently attached to his belt or braces.

"I say, Jack," he said, "they've all been talking about you."

"Have they, indeed? And pray, what did they say?"

"Oh, Pa said that you were exactly like himself that you were dreadfully lazy, but very clever; and tha

if you chose to try, you could do whatever you pleased. Georgie took your part, and said you weren't lazy at all, and Rachel didn't say anything. She never does say anything, but she always manages to have her own way. She's very clever, Rachel is."

Now this intelligence, satisfactory in so far as it went, was yet not exactly reassuring. Evidently I had returned as a suspect and upon my good behaviour. No man likes to play the part of the prodigal son; but to enact this role when there is no fatted calf killed for you, none of the old wine brought forth, and no lifting up of the sackbut, harp, psaltery, dulcimer, and all manner of music, is but poor work indeed. So I continued my way moodily, while Dick, picking up a huge fallen fir cone, made satisfactory trial of his new knife.

We arrived at the lake to find it was caught over, scantily, but with promise of skating to come. Dick rushed from place to place on the bank, to take up and reset his night lines, on which, in spite of the weather, were two or three big eels. These he strung in solemn triumph on a long withe, and so we turned back to the house. In the house I found them all re-assembled. It still wanted a couple of hours till dinner time, so I invited Dick up to my bedroom. Fresh country air invariably makes you sleepy, and I felt coming upon me what Shakespeare terms an "Exposition of Sleep." I took off my boots, threw myself down on my bed, •

and giving Dick strict orders to wake me in time for the hot water before dinner, was soon fast asleep. Dreamless sleep is of all blessings in this world, and of all anodynes incomparably the first and greatest.

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Two or three days afterwards the ice on the lake was pronounced to be competent, and the surface was swept with due and proper care, until it glistened like a great sheet of looking glass. The intelligence spread through the village and its outlying parts, and by noon the frozen surface was fairly well covered, and the clear shrill ring of steel echoed through the surrounding shrubberies, and died away in the palm branches overhead. Although Essex is a great skating country, we yet had no scientific skaters amongst us to make an exclusive circle to themselves, and so spoil the harmony of the meeting. Very few of us were masters of the outside edge. None could venture beyond a figure of eight. All that we attempted to do was to enjoy ourselves in our own way; and this we achieved very satisfactorily.

I was roaming alone, rolling in that delightfully easy method, the perfection of laziness, when you never lift either foot from the ice for a stroke, but fling your body from side to side, swing along by dead weight in a perpetual zigzag. I had lit a wooden pipe, buttoned up the collar of my pea-jacket, and looked in all

spects as much like all other young men as any modest young man need desire to look. Suddenly I became aware that there was someone on the ice whom I knew, and ought to remember only too well. It was my old sweetheart, Izzie Vivian, in the company of my sisters. I at once struck out my most superb outside edge and joined them with a flourish as complicated, if not perhaps as expressive, as the *dernière pirouette* of a *première danseuse*.

I bowed and shook hands, and I can solemnly declare that there was not even a twinkle, or the suspicion of it, in the eye of either of us.

"Has he not grown, my dear?" remarked my sister Georgie.

"Immensely," was Miss Vivian's somewhat prosaic answer.

This nonchalant acquiescence a little irritated me. As a matter of fact, I was neither taller nor shorter by the sixteenth of an inch than when I left Essex more than three years ago.

Then came the usual feeble gossip, for which my sisters were entirely responsible. Yesterday's mail had brought down the last number of the *Queen* and a batch of new novels from the London librarian. I was asked what the park looked like, and who were playing at the different theatres, and we got into a general atmosphere of the Court and Shakespeare and musical

glasses. It was easy talking enough for one, but it was none the less terribly dull. I could not help noticing, however, that my old flame had, in the language of novelists of the Richardson epoch, vastly improved. She had grown; she was more self-conscious; even her hair was more deftly and coquettishly arranged than of yore, while her feet no longer seemed too large for her body or troubled her as to their disposition. She was in every way more filled out and rounded off, if, in my capacity of son of an Essex squire, I may borrow a phrase from the vocabulary of the racing stable. We know how immense is the difference between the very youngest "man" and the biggest and burliest of all possible school-boys, even if the latter rejoice in the bushiest of whiskers and be captain of the eleven or the football team. There is the same difference between your young lady who has been to her first four or five balls, and her younger sisters who are still redolent of bread and butter and the nursery.

Pondering on these things in a listless manner, and thinking of nothing else in particular, I became suddenly aware that my sisters had veered off, and had left myself and Miss Vivian alone.

"I see you are back from the Isle of Wight," I said.

It was awkward and foolish of me, but I really could think of nothing else whatever to say.

"Oh yes," she laughed. "You know I had done nothing so very desperately wicked after all. Perhaps, too, the good old ladies at the school did not find me particularly tractable. At all events, they reported that, in their opinion; my education might be considered as 'finished' down to the very last extra, and on the strength of that certificate I am now at home again, and am told that I am to consider myself, in the accepted phraseology, as out; which means that I have been presented, that I dine in the evening when we give a dinner party, and am allowed to wear a necklace and a couple of bangles, and to indulge in a dress of something a little less simple than muslin."

In default of anything else, I asked her how she liked the change.

"I can hardly tell you," she replied. "Sometimes the new life pleases me well enough. At others I wish the old days were back again. There was certainly more freedom in them. But the change must come, of course, sooner or later. It is a great trouble."

Then we began to talk of other things, until it neared half-past three, and the day began to close. It was time to leave the ice, and we soon found ourselves at the summer house, where in summer we kept our bait and fishing tackle, and where now there was a general clatter as of the removal of many skates.

Of course I managed, under cover of my sisters, to escort Izzie to our lodge gates.

"You will come to-morrow?" cried the girls in chorus. "William says the thermometer is falling, and that the ice to-morrow will be splendid, if it is well swept in the evening."

"Oh, of course I shall come. I love skating, of all things." And so our little company broke up.

As we returned to the house, my sisters wanted to know if I thought Izzie had improved. I replied evasively that I supposed all girls improved about her age. I was told in return that I had come back with no more manners than a bear, to which I retorted that I had been diligently practising the art of cross-examination, and had not returned with any intention of being vivisected. "Besides," I remarked mockingly, "I have passed through an entire season at a select Bayswater boarding-house, and my heart is now as tough as the leg of a five-year-old rooster, or, for the matter of that, its gizzard."

"What a wonderful man of the world you have become!" cried my sisters in chorus, "and how immensely London has improved your manners. Pray, when are you going to be presented at Court?"

"When I take silk," I retorted, "I shall have to submit to that troublesome ceremony. It is one of the nuisances involved in taking silk."

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"When I take silk," I retorted, "I shall have to submit to that troublesome ceremony. It is one of the nuisances involved in taking silk."

"And, pray, what may taking silk mean?"

"It means, my dear sisters, 'coming out' and learning to mind your own business and not to talk about the business of other people, unless you are well paid for doing so, and do it in your professional capacity. In which case loquacity assumes the rank of a virtue."

"Dear me," remarked Georgie, addressing her younger sister, with a little sigh. "Quite a philosopher for his age, my dear."

To this sneer I did not condescend to reply, and the girls feeling, I suppose, that they had the best of the skirmish, assumed a corresponding air of aggressive importance. I did not long for Susan to bring them to their senses. Miss M'Lachlan would have been quite enough. But the presence of that most worthy spinster I should have hailed with clean delight. Her antipathy to young men was as nothing compared to her aversion to "minxes."

CHAPTER VIII.

I WENT to bed early that night. Skating makes one very indolent. I know of no exercise, except swimming, and perhaps tennis, out of which you can get a larger amount of fatigue in a given amount of time. I carefully opened my window, made up the fire so as to have a good draught up the chimney, and got into bed. Then, with my pipe alight, I began to turn matters over.

Susan Brabazon was out of my reach. With money and time I could no doubt have traced her. I had written to her through her solicitor, thanking her for what she had done in extricating me from the clutches of Mr. Raphael, and begging her to give me her address; but I had received no answer whatever, and was not likely to receive one now after the lapse of so many weeks, especially as Mr. Amos Clarke's managing clerk assured me, with every appearance of truth, that my letter had reached her, and that she had acknowledged its receipt in a business communication addressed to his master.

Clearly, then, I could only wait until it might

please her to write to me herself. Meantime what could I do better than stay where I was? It was to this conclusion, several considerations combined. I was unquestionably comfortable. It would have been idle to pretend I was not. I was living economically, and indeed saving money, which I should otherwise have wasted in London. And then, too, there was my *rencontre* with Izzie Vivian, for whom I felt all my old attachment reviving. I think it is as well to be thus entirely frank. I had been, no doubt, madly in love with Susan. But it had been the wild stormy love of passion. It might of course leap up at any moment if I saw her again; of this the chances seemed at present altogether hopeless.

Izzie Vivian, on the other hand, had been my first love.

On revient toujours à ses premières amours.

Besides, she had developed more in proportion to the few years that had gone over our heads than had I myself. I, although nominally a man, was still in reality only a youth. She had become a grown woman, tall, comely and winning. The odds in every way were against me—that is, if I was to attempt to resist the situation.

It was what bookmakers call a moral, that I should fall in love with her again, and, of course, I at once

proceeded to do so in the most orthodox and approved fashion.

There are, as I had by this time discovered, and as probably very few of my readers will need to be told, more ways than one of making love, according to the age, disposition, and rank of life of the lady. Among the list of books studied by the great Pantagruel, Master François Rabelais enumerates *De Calcaribus retinendis decades undecim*. *Decades centum* might certainly be written on the various methods of making love, a matter on which, it may be remembered, even Mr. Pickwick himself did not scorn to take the friendly advice of Mr. Peter Magnus.

Izzie had grown into a woman, and must be made love to accordingly; and in this scientific frame of mind it was that I resolved to set to work. The resolution taken, I lit a final pipe, and mixed myself some more whisky and water. Then I considered details, and having disposed of them to my complete satisfaction, I knocked the ashes out of my pipe, blew out my candle, and almost immediately was fast asleep.

The gift of instantaneous sleep is one of the happy privileges of those who, like young men and condemned criminals on the eve of execution, have the worst of their trouble yet before them.

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The Vivians were one of the oldest families in the

county. There are other Vivians in England who cannot prove common ancestry, although they are presumably connected, as they all have the same coat-of-arms and the same motto.

Izzie's father was an Essex Vivian, and chief of that ilk, but there were also the Northumberland Vivians and the Cornish Vivians—all with pedigrees going back to William the Conqueror, at least, and sufficient to mystify even a Garter King-at-Arms. Somehow or other, too, money went with the name. Either there were coal mines or slate quarries, or else there would be broad acres and large rent-rolls, with perhaps salmon fishing rights. The Vivians, in a word, ranked among those old county families which, as an acute French critic of our social life has observed, are prouder of their descent, and have better reason to be proud of it than have the bulk of our nobility.

Izzie was an only child, and, as the estates were unentailed, would ultimately enjoy in her own absolute right some twelve thousand a year. Thirty-five pounds a day, or thereabouts in round figures, is a very comfortable income, on which life can be most pleasantly spent. No wonder that when, three years ago, our youthful attachment was discovered, she should have been hurried out of my way. And yet here we were together again; and she now her own mistress, and very possibly as ready to renew our old attachment as ever.

What chances some men have! And yet I can honestly declare that I did not then, nor have I ever cared for money. It seems to me that if a man can hunt four days a week in the season, keep a sailing yacht of about eighty tons in the summer, and never know what it is to be troubled for a five-pound note, he ought to be not only happy, but extremely grateful. Beyond some such limits as these wealth becomes like that of the Vanderbilts, the Astors, the Stewarts, and the Mackays—a burden.

Next day we were all on the ice again. I am free to confess that I had dressed myself with more than my usual care, and had critically superintended the grinding of my skates, without which precaution the outside edge is apt to prove a snare and a delusion even to the most experienced.

It was a glorious day. The sun shone in a cloudless sky. The snow hung crisply on the fir trees, and in the frosty air every sound rang clearly and distinctly. All this I noticed as I left the house. As I was finally adjusting the screws of my skates, my sister Georgie touched me on the shoulder, and I looked sharply up.

"Jack," she whispered, "it's a lovely day. For once in your life make good use of your time, and don't be a fool. It's a *beautiful* day," she added, in a lighter tone, for the benefit of all whom it might concern.

"Never knew a jollier day in my life," I replied, at

once proceeding to convert my legs into compasses, and to describe with them geometrical diagrams—things in spirals, catenaries, and other transcendental curves, only to be approached by the aid of the differential calculus, and even then to be treated with respect as liable to involve you at any moment in a multiple point or a cusp, or, in the homely language of the ice, a “purl.”

Very soon I found the object of my quest. Miss Vivian was on the ice bestowing her smiles impartially between the curate of the parish—not my dear old friend and tutor, but a raw-boned successor from St. John’s, Cambridge—and a lad of about sixteen or seventeen, the son of a neighbouring gentleman not among the county families, fresh from Harrow, and far more conversant with bat fives and tuck shops than with anything at all approaching to a flirtation.

From our companions when I joined the group we soon managed to disengage ourselves. Both the curate and the schoolboy made some welcome excuse, and started off in different directions, so that Izzie and I found ourselves circling round the lake, she making the best of her pace, and I easily holding at her side with little more than the sway of my body to propel me.

“And, pray, what have you been doing in town?” she asked, after we had exchanged a few stray shots. “Flirting, I suppose? In fact, I have heard as much

from my cousin Walter, who has several friends in the Temple."

This was a bold stroke for "chase number one;" but I answered it by a cut for the "grille."

"Then your cousin Walter troubles himself more about my affairs than I do about his, and apparently knows rather less of them. Shall I tell you a little story about your dear cousin Walter? We had all been dining the other night at a place called the Blue Posts, in Burlington Street, you know where, at the top of the Burlington Arcade; and after dinner we had a crown bowl of rack punch, which, I am afraid, made some of us a little valiant; and your worthy cousin told the waiter he was no gentleman, and wanted to fight him, and the waiter, being, as he volubly assured us, 'the son of a jintleman as well known in county Corrick as any other,' declared his perfect readiness to make the matter 'an affair of honour.' So we interfered, and vowed that enough had been said on each side, and insisted that the two should express their mutual regret and shake hands; and your cousin had swallowed so much punch, and the waiter was so carried away by his vanity, that they actually did shake hands most solemnly. If you doubt me ask your cousin himself. He mayn't like it, but he'll tell you, no doubt."

"It's too bad of you," she replied, bursting into a fit of laughter; "and as for the poor waiter, I think I

came more creditably out of the matter than any of you."

"Don't you know what *the* Marquis of Waterford did after he had thrown the waiter out of the window? Sent for the landlord, and told him to stick down the broken waiter in the bill, and to send up another at once."

"Young gentlemen who talk like you were hung at the lamp-posts in the French Revolution."

"Yes; and their descendants have ruled with a rod of iron, and have tamed with a hand of steel the descendants of the very men who hung them. It's all 'the whirligig of time.' I don't believe you care a bit for me now," I continued, boldly changing the subject to the one which I was determined to approach.

"If you don't know," she answered maliciously, "I am sure I don't see how I can. You are tremendously clever, and ought to know everything, even if you do not."

This was altogether too exasperating, and I began to feel myself almost losing my temper.

"You know what I mean," I said, "perfectly well. You know, at any rate, that I care for you, or ought to know it."

"Oh, indeed. You have not done much to remind me of the fact during the last three years. I felt quite proud yesterday, to find that you still remembered me.

I had heard that you had condescended to transfer your affections to a lady named Brabazon, whom you were going to lead to the altar after first, of course, shooting her husband, or in some other way distinguishing yourself."

Now this was distinctly awkward, so I fenced with the thrust,—

"People seem to have been very busy with myself and my name and my affairs. I had no idea whatever that I was of so much importance."

She was roused now.

"You may possibly have been of more importance than your own modesty allowed you to imagine, but that was some time ago."

"Then I am in disgrace. It seems very hard, when even my father has taken the prodigal son to his bosom, and—veal not being in season at this time of year—has killed the fattest and most well-beloved of all his turkeys."

"If you are profane I shall refuse to forgive you at all, and shall at once whistle for my little curate."

"Then I will be as pious as you please."

"No, nor pious either. Do, pray, let us enjoy our skating. Your examination and cross-examination, which, I suppose, you have been practising up in town with a view to the confusion of thieves, quite worries me."

"I can take a hint," I replied gallantly.

"You can certainly take liberties. You are, for your age, a most impertinent young man. Now, how is it you do the 'Dutch Roll?'" I have quite forgotten."

And we went on circling about the ice, talking of every subject under heaven but the one upon which I had wished to force her attention.

I could see as I passed my sisters that they were fairly delighted, and for myself I felt flushed and insolent with victory; for I knew enough of Izzie Vivian, down even to the very tones of her voice, to be perfectly satisfied that she was in reality as fond of me as ever, and perhaps even more so. Some fires burn all the better if they have been for a while judiciously banked.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT day the ice was in better condition than ever. An enthusiast from Scotland, a Mr. Campbell, had telegraphed up to Perthshire for curling stones, and there was great excitement over the curling, which seemed to me to be a somewhat stupid imitation of bowls, inferior upon the whole to croquet, and intensely monotonous to lookers on. As, however, the thing was a novelty, it, of course, as they say in the theatre, drew.

I joined the select company on the ice, the villagers being permitted to gape in bewildered astonishment from the banks, and to wonder at a sport rather less intelligible to them than a spot-barred match would have been. But as we were all clustered together, and as almost everybody was pretending to know all about the game, and explaining it to everybody else, I found my opportunity to get near Izzie, and under cover of pointing out to her and emphasising with my stick the merits and beauties of the game, of which I was in reality profoundly ignorant, commenced a brief and earnest conversation

"You cannot possibly have meant what you said yesterday?" I observed tentatively.

"But indeed I did mean it and I mean it now. I do not want you, out of your great goodness, to throw your glove to me, Mr. Severn. The world is large enough for you and for me; and it is not at all for a mere country girl such as I am to presume to match myself against Mrs. Brabazon, of whose beauty and accomplishments I have heard so much."

"I do not see what Mrs. Brabazon has to do with the matter," I replied with considerable warmth. "I love you very dearly, and I want you to marry me. It seems to me that the matter is one in which Mrs. Brabazon's name need not be in any way involved. I do not know what you may have been told about that lady, but if you have been told the truth, you must know as well as I do that the facts are almost childishly simple."

"You think so," said Izzie.

"Yes, I do. Mrs. Brabazon and I boarded in the same house, and met every day. She is considerably older than I am——"

"So I have been informed," Izzie interrupted.

"She is considerably older than I am," I repeated, with angry emphasis. "We were surrounded by a set of ulgar, stupid people, and she kindly took an interest in me, and on one occasion rendered me a very great

service. That is the whole of the story, without the least reservation. I did, no doubt, tell her that I admired her, and she in almost so many words told me in return that I was a silly schoolboy, and, metaphorically speaking, boxed my ears. If you have ever read the *Secrétaire Intime*——”

“I do not read French novels, Mr. Severn.”

“Well, if you ever should read that book, you will know what I mean. She may not have intended my *congé* to have been humiliating, for she is naturally kindhearted, but it most decidedly had that effect upon me. I have neither seen nor heard from her since; and I have not the least idea where she is.”

“Oh, you will no doubt see her or hear from her in sufficiently good time, Mr. Severn. Yours, I am sure, is not a faint heart. And in the little interval you must bear up, possess your soul in patience and wait.”

“You are mocking me,” I said.

“I am not mocking you at all. It is not kind of you or fair of you to say so. I am only doing what is right.”

I hardly knew what I said. I went at my task with the pertinacity of a Caleb Cushing. I said the same thing over and over again, using vain repetitions as the heathen do, in the hope that I should be heard for my much speaking. And to my astonishment I actu-

produced my effect. Before we had left the ice Izzie had told me that she believed every word I had said, and was as fond of me as ever.

Thus, then, I went home in a happy frame of mind, and made myself more than usually agreeable to the other members of the household.

Next morning the weather had changed. It was not exactly raining, but a sort of Scotch mist was falling, and the mercury was slightly above freezing point, varying uneasily as the wind shifted. The surface of the snow, instead of being clear and crisp, was pitted and scarred; and with each movement of the boughs, the trees shook off their burdens, while the eaves and thatch dripped monotonously.

I was watching all this in a dissatisfied and querulous frame of mind, from one of the windows in the hall, when I saw Mr. Vivian's dog-cart driving hurriedly up the avenue. Mr. Vivian himself held the reins, and his groom occupied the back seat. I guessed there was mischief, and I certainly had no intention of shirking the fray, but I judged it more prudent, for the present at any rate, to keep out of the way and to see how events might shape themselves, instead of doing anything rash on my own account. Accordingly I retreated from the hall, instead of advancing, as I ordinarily should have done, to greet the newcomer.

I heard, from an upper room which commanded

the hall, Mr. Vivian enter, and saw him ushered into the library, where, as I knew, my father was at that time, busy with his news-papers, letters and accounts. Then I withdrew to the shrubberies and indulged in a pipe, leaving word with the servants where I could be found in case I was wanted.

I had no occasion to think out my plans, as I had nothing of which to be ashamed and nothing to conceal. If I had not exactly covered myself with glory up in London, I had, at all events, been called within the usual time, and was now a Barrister-at-law, ranking heral-dically as Esquire with Justices of the Peace immediately after the Sheriff and the County Coroner. My love episode with Mrs. Brabazon, and my transactions with Mr. Raphael, were certainly unknown to either Mr. Vivian or my father; else the latter would have alluded to them at once, and in no very pleasant manner, on the moment of my return, while I should have been told by Izzie, that her father knew all about them.

Something else must have happened; and what it was I very soon discovered, as a footman, specially sent on the service, hunted me out, and summoned me to my father's presence. When I entered the library, a dull, ponderous room, with ponderous and dilapidated furniture, my father was standing upon the rug in his most approved attitude of command, while Mr. Vivian

was seated in a stiff horsehair chair, looking anything but comfortable.

I entered the room defiantly, and with a look that most distinctly said, "Gentlemen of the guard, fire first." My father commenced in his most pompous manner.

"Mr. Vivian informs me, Jack, that you have so far violated all those rules of hospitality by which the conduct of a gentleman ought always to be controlled and, I may say, guided, as to again address yourself to his daughter in a most unbecoming and, indeed, ungentlemanly fashion. You have, he tells me, assuring me that he has the word of the young lady herself for the fact, again spoken to her of your affection, in spite of all that has taken place, and of all the unhappiness, that your conduct has caused. You have, in fact, he tells me, made love to her. If, sir, this be so, your conduct calls for, and in my judgment demands, something much more than an explanation."

Mr. Vivian expressed his entire concurrence in these choicely worded and evenly-balanced sentiments, emphasising his opinion with an oath which, if neither novel nor appropriate, was at all events vigorous and cheerful, and for which either of the two gentlemen would any day in his capacity of magistrate have fined an agricultural labourer five shillings, with five-and-twenty shillings costs, or in default have committed him

for the largest possible period of hard labour allowed by the statutes in that case made and provided.

A confused metaphor will best express my state of mind. The murder was out, so I stood to my guns.

"What you have heard, sir, is perfectly correct."

"Then, by the Lord, you ought to be horsewhipped!" roared Mr. Vivian.

"You are under a father's roof, sir," I replied, turning on him so sharply that he started in his chair. "If that is really your opinion you may give it me again in the market-place on Tuesday next, and I will bring my own whip with me for your convenience."

Now this was really dreadful. It was altogether too much. Here was I, a mere boy, defying a couple of gentlemen, of whom one had actually been High Sheriff, while the other was every year expecting to be pricked. The speech fell upon the two magnates like a bomb-shell. They could hardly believe their ears. Not Captain Vanslyperken in Marryat's inimitable *Dog-Fiend* could have been more outraged on hearing that the audacious Jemmy had d—d the eyes of the Port-Admiral.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir!" cried my father, throwing into his voice as much of a roar as its natural compass would permit.

"You are only after my daughter's money!" bellowed Mr. Vivian, with select words of emphasis of his own.

Now, Mr. Vivian's estates were within a month of passing from his hands when he had rescued them from the hammer by marrying Izzie's mother—one of the two daughters of a wealthy oil crusher and linseed cake manufacturer at Wapping. And of this fact I thought the opportunity offered itself to cheerfully remind him.

He rapped out another oath worthy of a regimental sergeant-major, and struggled to his feet with every symptom of imminent apoplexy.

"Leave the room, sir!" yelled my father.

"Certainly, sir," I replied; and swinging round on my heel I slammed the door after me briskly and defiantly as a sort of farewell slap in the face.

Then I deliberately lit a cigar in the hall, and so strolled out on to the terrace, where I knew they could see me, and sauntered indolently up and down, puffing at my cigar with sufficient pantomime to indicate thorough enjoyment of it.

They must have talked for about twenty minutes, and then I heard Mr. Vivian's dog-cart roll away over the gravel. I returned to the house, marched into the butler's pantry and drew myself a tankard of ale. This I consumed slowly and deliberately; but my father either did not want me, or certainly did not send for me, and as there was nothing better to be done, I selected myself a stout walking-stick, whistled a favourite

terrier from the stable-yard, and once in the high road set off at a brisk pace for the nearest village, where I intended to see the landlord of the "Severn Arms," and gather from him, so far as I could, what amount of gossip as to my affairs might be afloat.

CHAPTER X.

EARLY the next morning, one of the grooms found me out, and handed me a letter. It had been given him by a gardener of Mr. Vivian's, to whom it had been given by one of the maid-servants, and having passed through so many hands, it was proportionately dirty and crumpled. I tore open the envelope, and found inside a letter which, of course, I had expected, and which, with all its girlish iteration, and doubts and hopes and fears, it would be unkind to set out here in *totidem verba*.

Izzie was heart-broken. Her father had threatened all kinds of dreadful things; but she did not believe that the law would allow him to do any of them, and so she didn't much care. Besides, she was weary of life. As for giving me up, nothing should ever make her do anything of the sort; and as for believing all the horrid, odious, dreadful things that they all kept on saying about me, she did not believe a word of them, and wished to tell me that no power on earth would ever make her do so. She would give anything to see me, if it was only for a minute, and she should always

think of me the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning.

Of course, she would never for a moment do anything so horrible as to marry any one except myself. At the same time, she felt she could not marry without her father's consent, but he was very fond of her, and no doubt in a year or two I should be defending all the murderers at the assizes, and so be made a judge or even Lord Chancellor, and between now and then she would do all she could to coax him round. And then came her signature in a bold, firm hand.

I put her letter into my inner breast coat-pocket, and, to prevent the possibility of accident, carefully pinned the pocket up. I devoted the best part of the day to a brisk stroll through the fields of neighbouring and friendly farmers, taking with me a light single-barrelled gun, and a favourite old clumber spaniel.

I knocked over a hare, which I left at the house of the tenant on whose land it had been killed, and in some marshy land flushed and bowled over a brace of jack snipe, which I reserved for our rector. Then I strode manfully home to dinner, resolving to get to my room as soon as possible after the meal, to light a roaring fire, and to sit before it and think things over. This virtuous, or, at all events, modest programme I fully carried out. Only, before I had been thinking things over five minutes, the warmth and the noisy

crackle of the blazing logs made me drowsy, and ultimately I fell asleep, until I was roused by the crash and rattle of my pipe, which had fallen from between my teeth into the fender. Then I pulled myself together, undressed leisurely, and, under the immense quilt of strange old fancy patch-work, dreamed placidly and persistently, not of Izzie Vivian, but of Mrs. Brabazon.

Philosophers and psychologists tell us that we are not responsible for our dreams, and I suppose this must be the case, for, as the great philosopher Plato has pointed out, even the most respectable and sober-minded of people are apt at times to dream of the most extraordinary and awful things, and very often to be the chief actors in and about them. From which he argues that, in sleep, we can pretty well estimate the worst side of our nature, gauge for ourselves its intensity, and so the better put ourselves on our guard against it in our waking moments.

All this is very philosophical, and may or may not be true. But it is undeniably certain that, as a matter of fact, I dreamed of Mrs. Brabazon, of whom, for some days past, I had not even been thinking. I was yachting with her, and then hunting with her, and then skating with her. But whatever I was doing, she was with me, and I am bound to confess that I felt the better and brighter and happier for her company.

Next morning came a long interview with my father, which gave me a deeper insight than ever into the extent of his worldly wisdom. In reality, it seemed the old gentleman would be immensely pleased to see me married to Miss Vivian. There was nothing he would like better, only he did not care to say so, or, to be more exact, had not the necessary moral courage to say so. He was dreadfully afraid of offending Mr. Vivian, who was richer by far and more powerful than himself, and with whom all the squires round about would be sure to side. He owned this to me with a frankness worthy of Panurge himself, and after using some very strong language with regard to Mr. Vivian, and more especially with regard to his eyes, liver, and soul, assured me that, as far as he had any feeling in the matter, he sympathised heartily with myself; that I had done nothing to be ashamed of; and that, when he was my age, he would have acted exactly as I had. The oration was prosy and self-conscious, but it was reassuring, and we shook hands heartily at its conclusion.

My sisters were equally sympathetic, but vague, of course, as is the school-girl habit, hoping that all would come well, but not being exactly sure about it and emphasising their remarks with sage shakings of the head. But they meant well; and upon the whole I find that the tide of public opinion was distinctly in

favour. And it is always best to have public opinion with you, whether you be a cabinet minister or only a young and briefless barrister.

Two days later the frost had entirely disappeared, and as the hounds met within two miles of our place, I modestly apparelled myself in buckskins, butcher boots, and a black coat, and trotted over to the meet.

Izzie was there with her father, and with the old coachman to do special duty as her groom; and in the bustle of trying to persuade an obstinate old fox to break cover, I found myself near her. We had opportunity for a few hurried words.

"I thought it best," said I, "not to answer your letter. The answer might not have reached you."

"You were quite right," she said; "I doubt if it would have reached me. Now, all that you have got to do is to go back to town and set to work as hard as you can. I shall be sure to hear of you, and I dare say you will hear from me. But don't write until I write to you. And be very good and very industrious for my sake."

This, of course, I vowed to be, and at that moment we heard from the other corner of the wood the cry of "Gone away! gone away! gone away!" I had no resource but to leave Izzie under her escort and to settle down to my work.

I rode hard that day, and straight, and fairly

covered myself with glory, being in the first flight and at the very tail of the hounds from start to finish. The fox was rolled over in the open, and there was but little left of him by the time the hounds were beaten off. A hard riding farmer got the brush, which was presented with due solemnity to the eldest daughter of the lord lieutenant, who happened to be in the field; and as it was too late for the chance of a second kill, I let out my stirrups and jogged leisurely home.

My father, who was in good temper, congratulated me on my riding, of which he told me he had heard considerable praise in competent quarters, and we then had dinner together, and after dinner, a bottle of port. The port warmed the old gentleman's veins, and we sat smoking our cigars over the logs until the orthodox hour of ten, when I bid my father good-night.

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On my return to town, which took place in a day or two, I stuck to chambers with laudable assiduity, and actually got a few briefs. I did not burst upon the world after the fashion of Erskine, but I tried to do my work efficiently and thoroughly. There is, as any barrister will tell you, hardly any step at the Bar between fifty pounds a year and five hundred. And I before long found that, one way and another, I was making as nearly five hundred as might be, and, in fact, was being looked upon as a rising young man.

It has been said that a leading firm of London solicitors can take a young man fresh from the University, pilot him through his career at the Bar, and eventually land him on the Woolsack. This may be a slightly exaggerated statement, but, as far as my experience goes, it is substantially true. At all events, success at the Bar depends almost entirely upon the patronage of solicitors; and I should have had but a poor chance, if Mr. Honeybone, senior partner in the firm of Honeybone, Salter, Mould and Honeybone, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, who, five-and-twenty years before, had been in the habit of instructing my grandfather, had not taken me up.

"I have heard, Mr. Severn," said Mr. Honeybone, who presented himself in person one day at my chambers, "that you have been lately called to the Bar, and, for the sake of your grandfather—a most remarkably talented gentleman, sir, who, if he had met with his deserts would have been Lord Chancellor—I am anxious to do what I can for you. I hope to send you a few briefs, and if you will kindly give them your attention, I am sure that our relations will not be unsatisfactory, so far as you are concerned."

I thanked Mr. Honeybone very cordially, and promised to do my best; and I am bound to say that he was as good as his word, and, in the language of the judge in Mr. Gilbert's witty skit, *Trial by Jury*, "briefs

came trooping gaily." Through Mr. Honeybone's intervention I became known, and I got on. I shall never forget his disinterested kindness.

I lived with the strictest economy, allowing myself no amusement except my favourite pool; and thus it came about that, one happy morning, I found, on consulting my banker's book, that I was able to draw a cheque for something more than the one hundred and twenty pounds I owed Susan Brabazon, and to purchase into the bargain, at London and Ryder's, a very handsome little bracelet of emeralds and black pearls.

Armed with the cheque and with the bracelet neatly packed, I made my way to Mrs. Brabazon's solicitor in the Old Jewry, who again refused to give me the address of his client, but informed me that he would at once forward any letter to her that I might give to him. So I left my letter and its enclosure together with the little parcel in his hands, and went my way.

Four days later I found a letter from her at my chambers, so characteristic that I cannot refrain from giving its words,—

"GRAND HOTEL,

"NICE, *November 19, 18—.*

"MY DEAR JACK,—I have heard of you oftener than you have thought. I have made it my business to be posted up in your movements, and I can see, from the

law reports in the newspapers, that you are doing very well indeed. I always thought this would be so, and if good wishes help anyone, you have most certainly had mine.

"I do not mind telling you that I should like to see you again, and hardly think there would be any impropriety in doing so. What say you? Suppose when the courts rise for the Christmas vacation, you run over here for a week or a fortnight, and enjoy yourself quietly, or, as I have to go to Ireland, shall I take London in my way? I think I should like to see dull old London again, and if you behave yourself you may take me about a little. That will, I think, be the best. However, I leave it to you.

"If you insist on treating my little present as a debt, I cannot quarrel with you, and do not think the worse of you for your independence. The bracelet is a very beautiful one, and you shall see it on my wrist when we meet.

"If you wire to me, I will start for Paris at once, and if you like to see me across the Channel, I will meet you at the Westminster, where I generally stay, and we will have a night at the play, or, if you prefer it, at the Eden,—I would as soon the one as the other. Kind love,—Ever yours,

"SUSAN."

I wired as I was requested, and left London for Paris the next night. Is there any pride of a better kind than that of a young man in spending, as a gentleman ought, the money which he has made by his own honest work?

CHAPTER XI.

WE had at Paris what I may distinctly term a good time of it. Susan's tastes were still as simple as ever. We went to the theatre; we dined modestly at Bignon's, and the only approach to anything like frivolity was an evening at the Folies Bergères, with a supper afterwards at the Café de la Paix.

Susan was the same as ever—warm-hearted, full of life, and evidently thoroughly happy to be with me again. The day in Paris became four or five days of the most intense enjoyment. Recollect, I had never before been to Paris in my life. And then, at last, we found ourselves in the Calais train hurrying over the snow-clad country, with all the paraphernalia of railway travel complete. Oddly enough, we encountered no one whom we knew on the journey, and I deposited Susan at the Charing Cross Hotel, taking up my own abode at my chambers.

Next evening we dined early at Francatelli's, and went, after dinner, to the Lyceum, where I had secured a couple of stalls. Irving was more than usually characteristic. His sect would, no doubt, have considered him

at his best, although I doubt if Macbeth is altogether a part that suits him. I was, however, thoroughly enjoying the performance, when, between the acts, I stood up to take a look round the house, and, to my astonishment and discomfiture, saw Izzie with some friends in a private box.

I bowed to her at once, but she returned my salute with a quiet, steady stare, and then began to busy herself in conversation with a young man of the most approved Foreign Office type, who was leaning over the back of her chair.

There was nothing to be done for it but to see the piece out, which I did, paying my companion the most marked attention, and otherwise assuming an air of thorough defiance.

When the curtain finally fell, I looked after her wraps and opera-glass, and took her boldly through the *foyer* to our brougham, into which I had the pleasure of handing her and following her under Izzie's very eyes. We went to a restaurant famous for its suppers; and that most enjoyable meal of the day over, I saw her to her hotel. Then I lit my cigar, and strolled back to the Temple in a meditative frame of mind.

"There will be," said I to myself, as I finally blew out my candle, "the very devil himself to pay, and

short allowance of pitch," and like a bad young man I went to sleep.

During the afternoon of the next day I got a letter which, for better security, had been registered. I knew the handwriting, I need hardly say, and tore it open.

"DEAR MR. SEVERN," it began,—“After what I saw last night, you can hardly be surprised at my writing to you to tell you that you must never speak to me again, and that if you do I must ask my father to protect me from you.

“You have behaved very cruelly and very wickedly. I would not have believed it of you if your worst enemies had told me as much. I will not say a word about sorrow, for I doubt if I feel any. If you have any letters of mine, I trust to such good feeling as there may still be in you to let me have them back at once, and never to mention my name to any of your acquaintances or friends.—Yours truly,

“ISABELLA VIVIAN.”

The epistle acted upon me like a cold douche. I read it three or four times before locking it up in my secretary. Then I put on my hat and sallied out in a purposeless manner towards Spring Gardens and St. James's Park.

“After all,” said I to myself, “if this is really a

specimen of her temper, perhaps things are better as they are. I, at all events, will not allow myself to be worried by so preposterous a quarrel." This frame of mind ultimately brought me to the Windham, where I looked in for my letters, and finding none to trouble me, had a philosophical lunch. There is some marvellous burgundy at the Windham which is much to be recommended as steadying the nerves, nor does it go at all amiss with game pie.

I could now afford myself these small creature comforts, and I was not above doing so. Then I turned over the evening papers, and so lit my cigar and strolled round to Charing Cross. Mrs. Brabazon had afternoon tea to offer me, and was pleasanter than ever. If I had nothing better to do that evening, would I give her the rest of the day? She would play the piano if I liked, or we could talk, or I might make myself comfortable on the sofa, and if I chose, go to sleep.

I elected to stop with her, and she came and sat by my side. Once again I was thoroughly happy. I have no idea what we talked about, or whether we talked at all, but I remember the hours slipping by until dinner-time; and I remember that after dinner we drew up our chairs in front of the fire, and made ourselves very happy and comfortable. It was two o'clock before I left her. On the table in my chamb'

was my clerk's usual memorandum. The day was a blank one. I had no case in the paper, and no clients wanted an appointment. The prospect of a holiday suited me exactly, for I had of late had quite as much work as I wanted. So I drew the bearskin coverlet over myself in a happy frame of mind, and slept far too soundly for any dreams.

When my laundress roused me in the morning to inquire whether I would have tea or brandy-and-soda, I virtuously chose the tea, and I then sauntered down to the Windham to draft an answer to Izzie's letter. "I am not a boy to have my face slapped in this way," I muttered to myself as I turned into St. James's Square. And the undeniable truth of this reflection put me in the best possible terms with myself, so that I glanced over my *Times* with all the importance of a county member, or a city merchant, and threatened to back my bill with a complaint as to the inferior quality of my fillet of sole. The grey-headed coffee-room clerk was startled, and evidently wondered what the world was coming to when young men, little more than schoolboys, ordered the waiters about as if the club were an ordinary hotel, and wound up their breakfast with liqueur.

CHAPTER XII.

THEN I concocted a letter to Izzie. It was very long, and no doubt very stupid. But it practically told her as much of the truth as it was at all convenient for me that she should know. I began by accusing her of a jealousy which, I boldly declared, amounted almost to insanity, and warned her that to give way to idle suspicion without reason or inquiry would make her life a burden to herself, and lose her the friendship of all those whose opinion she might value.

I told her that Mrs. Brabazon was, as she must now have seen for herself, sufficiently old to make the idea of our being in love with each other ludicrous. I had met her at the boarding-house in Bayswater, of which she had heard me speak, and which was a cheap, humdrum, respectable place, with a curate and a Scotch spinster among its leading pensionaires. Our acquaintance thus commenced, had improved. More than that I had nothing to tell. If any man said a word against Mrs. Brabazon, I should know how to act. As for what women might say or think I cared very little.

I was sorry she wanted her letters back, but I supposed I must send them, else she might perhaps accuse me of showing them about. She should receive them by hand that evening.

Then I stopped to consider whether there was anything else disagreeable that I could conveniently add, and coming to the conclusion that there was not, went round to the address in Princes Gate from which she had written, and left the letter with my card in person.

Then I made my way back to my chambers, hunted up all her letters to me, arranged them neatly in chronological order, docketed them savagely with their dates, tied them up with most uncompromising red tape, sealed them up in a linen envelope, and sent them down to Princes Gate by a trustworthy commissioner.

After all this I turned into the Strand, and down a little court on the south side, where is a Roman well of icy-cold water perpetually spurting up from the ground into a small stone bath. Into this I plunged, and came out feeling considerably fresher and better. After a bath a small cup of black coffee is, as we all know, recommended by the faculty. The bath and the coffee over I walked briskly down to Charing Cross.

Susan was in and radiant. She was going to start for Ireland the next day. Meantime, she wanted another quiet evening. She had had quite enough of

theatres, but I might, if I liked, take her out to dinner.

So we dined at an hotel in Jermyn Street, which used to be then, and I believe still is, notorious for the skill of its *chef*, and then made our way back to Charing Cross, where we sat talking over one thing and another until one in the morning.

The next day, or, to be more exact, that day, I saw her off from Euston, and then with a light heart found myself in London my own master, free from trouble, but suffering from loneliness. There are times when, as compared with London, most of us must have felt that the Sahara, or Tadmor, or a Yucatan forest seem cheerful, lively, bustling places.

Then I betook myself to my club, where, after a cutlet and a pint of claret, I withdrew to the smoking-room with a view of thinking things over.

Thinking things over, even in the most comfortable of chairs, usually leaves things pretty much where they were when you began. Your life is before you like a great diorama, or a view from a mountain top, but you gain very little additional knowledge. All I arrived at in the way of a conclusion was that, for the present, I might just as well let things take their course. This sage resolve made, and the night being still young, I walked off to Regent Street, where I had the satisfaction of convincing a young and promising mark

that he still had a good deal to learn. And I then made my way back to my chambers, and read myself to sleep with a novel. There is all the difference in the world between an idle day and a vicious day, although it suits a certain class of parsons, and a certain stamp of steady men of business to affect to confound the two. There are worse pleasures in the world than sitting on a five-barred gate, listening to the lark and thinking of nothing. Of course bishops and Lord Chancellors and city men never sit on a gate and listen to the lark. So much the worse for them; that is all.

.

A few days later Susan took town on her way back to Nice. She gave up to me the best part of a day, and we enjoyed ourselves quietly and pleasantly after our usual manner.

Her own portion of the amusement consisted to a great extent in giving me good advice. I was to keep out of debt; I was to stick to the Bar, and avoid wasting the day of little beginnings. I had better have my name up at good chambers in the Temple, and have a room in some riverside street off the Thames, or, better still, in Mayfair. I was to avoid gambling, and as soon as I could afford it, to keep a horse—a horse of his own being, in her opinion, as necessary to a young man in town, if he can afford it, as is even his club.

I listened very patiently to all this, interspersing it with comments of my own, and we parted the best of friends.

"You shall hear from me," she said, "regularly once a week, and you must write back once a week. You were always a dear good boy, and you amuse me immensely. In the good old days of the good old East India Company you would have carved your way out pretty well with your sword. But there's right stuff in you, Jack, if you don't let it rust. And now you must go for the night. I have things to do and people to see. I leave by the tidal to-morrow, and you may come to the hotel, if you like, three-quarters of an hour before it starts."

I went to the hotel at the time appointed, saw her get into the train, and then quietly followed her in, insisting that I had nothing else to do for the day; that I would pass the afternoon at Folkestone, and that the smell of sea air would do me good.

Susan demurred a little at my disobedience, but I think that, upon the whole, she took the compliment as a practical one and was pleased by it. What we had to say to one another my readers can pretty well guess. We were neither of us in the love-making stage or the love-making mood, and if our compartment had contained four other passengers, their presence would in no way have disconcerted or annoyed us.

I saw her safely on board, waited till the very last stroke of the bell, and then stood on the quay and watched until the vessel faded away into a streak of smoke, and the streak of smoke itself into the haze of the horizon.

I returned to London by the afternoon train and got to my chambers. Next day I did a good day's work. Business was beginning to grow upon me, and it was business, too, of a good kind—mercantile work from large city firms, where there are thousands of pounds involved on each side, and a few hundreds of guineas, more or less, for counsel is but a mere trifle in the bill of costs.

I had a naturally clear head, and I took a keen interest in the topography and natural history of that debatable belt of ground which lies between the custom of merchants and the law of the land. And now there began to appear upon my shelves the United States law reports as well as those of my own country, and if my friends had wanted to see my name in the papers, they would have had to look to the reports of what were then called the sittings at Guildhall, and to those of the Admiralty and the Wreck Commissioners' Court. Work of this kind is very lucrative. I had, before long, to consult my bankers as to how I should invest my savings. I took lodgings in Mayfair as Susan had suggested, and at six o'clock in the evening, during each

day in term, a groom used to make his appearance with my horse under the windows of my chambers.

I could have dined out if I had so pleased every evening, but I used to plead business as an excuse as often as I could, and got the reputation of being a more or less obstinate bachelor.

Of any vice, unless playing billiards for the love of the thing be a vice, I was utterly ignorant. I was never seen in questionable company, or at questionable places of resort. Fast clubs—the Monaco, the Écarté Club, and the Peacock were unknown to me; and if a private detective had been told off by any anxious mother to watch my movements, he would, I am sure, have reported that I was a most quiet and well-conducted young man.

I had all this time received no answer to my letter from Izzie, although I heard of her from my sisters and occasionally from people in the neighbourhood. Sometimes her silence distressed me; at others it simply made me angry. But, exactly as muscles will wither from disuse, I began to find myself growing indifferent towards her, if not indeed positively a little resentful. In a very few years, if things went on as they were going, I should be a Queen's Counsel. I had already made up my mind to endeavour to secure a seat in Parliament at the next general election.

Meantime I regarded home and everything co

nected with it, with a daily increasing apathy. If I had met my father in Pall Mall I should most probably have nodded to him. If I had met him out at dinner I should have shaken hands and asked him how he was. But there is no greater mistake in the world than to fancy yourself master of destiny because you happen for the moment to be master of the situation. Were I given to sticking up texts over my portals, the one I should select would be, I think, "Time and I against any two." Only, take the old father respectfully but firmly by his forelock, else he will shamble by you and you will find yourself idle in the marketplace.

CHAPTER XIII.

LONG Vacation came at last, after six months of more than usually hard work, compensated for by more than unusually heavy fees.

My lodgings in Chapel Street, Park Lane, had their shutters put up, and the upholsterer's man solemnly wrapped my books and pictures in brown holland. My horses had their shoes taken off, and were turned out to grass, and my groom condescended to transmute himself for the nonce into a travelling factotum.

I began with some idea of visiting either Venice or the ruined cities of Zuyder Zee; but I abandoned each idea. Barristers in practice take their pleasure very mechanically. They object to long journeys and hotels, crowded with a surging ebb and flow of tourists of all kinds from the *roturier* of St. Swithin's Lane, down to the suburban grocer, intent upon his honeymoon.

So I ran down to one of the quaintest little places that I know in England—Dawlish, which is too near Torquay to become a suburb of that immense city of villas, as Paignton has, and which still remains little more than an overgrown village, with its trout stream

babbling down its centre to the sea, and its lodging-houses on either bank, and behind it running away up the chine into the hills, the hanging woods of Luscombe. Dawlish had begun to boast of an hotel, and after ingratiating myself with the landlord, I took his best sitting-room and a couple of bedrooms, telling him that I might want the second for a friend. And the day now drawing towards its close, I took a brisk stroll along the sea-wall to what is called the Warren.

Dawlish is as dull and primitive a place as you need come across in a fortnight's tour. Luckily I had brought down some novels and a box of my own cigars. Besides, if I did not like the place, I had only to leave it. "It is a funny thing," I said to myself, as I turned into bed that night, "you declare very valiantly that, if you do not like a place, you have only to leave it. You go down to it. You find it a more beastly place than even the worst reports of its enemies had led you to expect. There is nothing to be done. There is not even shooting or fishing; and yet you find yourself stopping on and loafing about with your hands in your pockets, and chatting to the boatmen, and vowing every day that you will go to-morrow. Now, I shouldn't be at all surprised if you were to find yourself doing nothing here for a fortnight at least. Well, perhaps a fortnight on the mud will do you no harm. And if you want excitement, Torquay and Paignton are handy."

Next morning I wrote to Mrs. Brabazon, whose address I happened to know, telling her where I was, and asking her to come down and prevent suicide from melancholia, which would certainly be my fate if she did not intervene, as now that I had got to the place, I felt far too lazy, apathetic and nerveless to leave it.

The latter was hardly any exaggeration. South Devon is the most enervating climate in England, or, for the matter of that, in the whole of her Majesty's dominions. Nor do things mend until you approach the limits of Cornwall. The women are old and haggard at thirty, and grey and wrinkled at thirty-five, while the men by forty are eaten up with rheumatic gout, and its kindred ailments. A week of it is, or thought to be, enough for any man. So I was thinking to myself, when the chambermaid brought me my early cup of coffee and my letters.

I despatched all of them before I came to Mrs. Brabazon's. Hers was short, womanly and friendly. She had heard of Dawlish, she told me, and had known people who had been there once. She had never even heard of anyone who had had the hardihood to venture there a second time. No doubt I found it dull, but she would come down with pleasure. I might expect her at any hour, and had better make preparations for her speedy advent.

She dated from London, and only two trains fr

London reached Dawlish in the course of the day, so I killed time by wandering towards the Warren in quest of sandpiper until the indicated hour for the arrival of the first train, and met it in looking, as I flattered myself, fresh and bronzed and wholesome as a young Englishman should.

Mrs. Brabazon arrived by it, and after giving orders about her luggage, I took her up to the hotel and installed her in her quarters. Then we taxed the resources of the town, and discovered a pony-basket, with a decent Exmoor pony, and so made our way up to Luscombe.

Luscombe was in all its beauty, and I know few country seats more lovely. I certainly would sooner own it than either Powderham or Chudleigh. It is a place that would gladden the heart of a Stanfield or a Gainsborough—distinctly English scenery; as English as Normandy itself, which is saying a good deal.

Then we returned to the inn, and had one of our old happy *tête-à-tête* dinners, after which she, as usual, took the sofa, while I wheeled an arm-chair up by her feet, and stretched myself out in placid enjoyment of a cigar, with some black coffee.

"And how are you getting on at the Bar?" she asked. "Are you paying the rent of your chambers and your evening steak and mashed potatoes at the Cock'?"

"I have nothing to grumble at," I laughed. "I have chambers in the Temple on the first floor, with imposing Turkey carpet, oak furniture, and properly bound law reports, from the earliest days down to the latest monthly number. My clerk is prosperous, and has a villa of his own somewhere up at Stoke Newington. My own chambers are in Chapel Street, and I ride up to the Temple every morning. That will let you know how the Bar has used me. It is a most gambling profession. You may stick at it for years and never pay your laundress, or you may get into the right groove in a manner simply miraculous. As often as not the cleverest men are left in the ditch, while men with not a tithe of their wits or of their solid knowledge, sail away over the country with both hands down. You never can tell; I will defy anybody to do so."

She laughed at this, but I could see that her mind was a little uneasy, and she arranged her pose very skilfully.

"And how about your love affairs? I suppose you have had any number."

"A barrister in full work has no time for love-making. It is as much as he can do to dine out once or twice a week. If he is to do any justice to his work, he must keep his head clear by going to bed at twelve, or even eleven if he can manage it. That is why bar-

risters so often marry their cooks or their laundresses. They say, as they look in the glass and see the crow's feet and the bald temples, 'By Jove! It's getting time I married. Whom shall I marry? Why not Mrs. Jackson? She knows my ways, and she won't give herself airs.' It's certainly not romantic—quite the reverse; but then you know it has been profoundly observed that the perfection of sound English common law is nothing more nor less than the perfection of sound English common sense."

"And have you informed your laundress of your intention?"

"No, I have not. She is a married woman with one eye, six children—whom she supports—and a drunken husband, whom she occasionally thrashes. You might, as Sydney Smith said, read the Riot Act to her and disperse her, or call out the military to ride her down, or send her out to people a colony, but the idea of any one man marrying her as she now stands is simply ridiculous. It is out of the question."

"Then your heart is whole."

"Absolutely whole," I replied, "and as hard as a bullock's hide, or the nether millstone itself. My love days are over. I look back on them with much the same curiosity as I do on the old days of marbles, jam tarts, and green apples."

"Then, I suppose, you will marry for money?"

"I make more money than I can spend. I have to ask my bankers what to do with it every now and again."

"Then you will marry a judge's daughter, or the daughter of some peer with a large family."

"Why on earth can you not believe me? I have told you that I prefer my freedom, and that I mean to keep it. Why, if I were to marry I should have to be solemnly reconciled to my family. And what a fearful purgatory in life that would involve. My father has tried drawing bills on me as it is, but I have refused to pay them, and have left him to take the consequences, which, I fancy, were unpleasant."

"You might surely make a marriage that would involve none of these terrible consequences. You could find a woman who would sympathise with you, look up to you, and be an ornament to your house."

"I do not know where such a woman is to be found. And I have no house, and so do not want my house adorned. I prefer my liberty to everything else in the world, and it is my inflexible determination to keep it."

"That sounds worse than hard-hearted. It sounds positively selfish; and selfishness is hateful in the young."

"Perhaps it is. My youth, as you call it, will cure itself. My selfishness, I am afraid, will grow worse. It is, you know, the besetting sin that grows upon one with old age."

"I shall argue with you no longer," she pouted petulantly.

"It would really be waste of time," I replied, "and now that we are together, we can put our time to much better and brighter purpose."

"Very well, Jack," she said, "I suppose you must have your own way," and in a minute or two we were chatting about all manner of things as if nothing whatever had passed.

It was a glorious moonlight, and we took a turn on the Parade by the side of the railway, before bringing the day to a close.

"Good-night," I said, as I shook hands with her in the little hall. "We will breakfast at nine to-morrow, if it suits you, and I will come back to you fresh from the sea and fragrant of ozone."

"Good-night," she said, "and pleasant dreams." And so, under the very eyes of the gaunt and bitter chambermaid, we parted with an affectionate kiss.

"Thank heaven!" said I, as I blew out my candle and dived into bed. "Thank heaven that *that* business is over for good and all! But it was a fair crunch while it lasted."

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE days later we left Dawlish. I took Mrs. Brabazon up to London, and deposited her in safety at the Charing Cross Hotel, *en route* for the Continent. And we dined together again—this time at a noted Italian restaurant, where they keep Chianti, and as near an approach to Lacrymæ Christi, as a man who dines in a public room has any right to expect for his money.

Then we spent the evening together by a large open window, looking down in all the roar and turmoil of London. We had nothing much about which to talk, being perfectly *en accord*, so that we were most delightfully lazy. I remember, amongst other things, that we played first at Bob-Cherry, and then at Fly-Loo. The former pastime has the merit of contorting your features and making you ridiculous. You must take a fine cherry by the stalk between your teeth, bend your head down fairly over your plate, and try to pull up the cherry into your mouth by the aid of your teeth and your tongue. The feat is far more difficult than might be supposed.

Fly-Loo is much simpler, requiring nothing on your

own part but entire immobility. You select a lump of sugar, and place it in the centre of your plate. Your friend at the other side of the table does the same; or you may make a round game of it with as many players as you like. The pool is formed, and is swept by the man upon whose sugar the first fly settles. As there is no banker the stakes are limited, and you need not ruin yourself at Fly-Loo unless you try very hard indeed to do so.

When we had finished our Bob-Cherry and our Loo, I bid her a most genuinely affectionate good-night. Then I went round to my club and hurried off some necessary business letters. After that, I slept the sleep of the just, and next morning was rattling along the road to Scotland as fast as a couple of enormous engines, yoked tandem-fashion, could drag the long train of heavily-loaded carriages.

I had secured a window seat in a smoking compartment. I had every travelling luxury from the morning papers to a luncheon case. This being so I could afford to disregard my companions.


It is a bad habit to make acquaintances in a railway train. Nine travellers out of every ten are distinct bores, and the tenth is as often as not something very much worse than a bore, no matter in what style he may be making his journey.

Georges Lachaud, son of that veteran advocate, Maître Lachaud, is a most amusing writer, and when I

was not looking out of the window I was laughing at his pages. So the time slipped away, until with infinite click and rattle of points and levers and grinding of wheels, and blowing of the whistle, we rolled into Edinburgh, a city the hotels of which are as good as those of any other in the United Kingdom—if not indeed better.

Next morning I continued my journey in the direction of Killiecrankie, until I reached the shooting-box which my friends had taken. We were as compact a bachelor party as need be—about eight of us, all told, with any amount of stores and any number of gillies, and the water, as I was told, and soon found to be the fact, was positively alive with fish. Next morning we sallied out early, and by the time we were disposed to return to the bothie I had landed four very creditable fish to my own rod, the largest, which was twenty-five pounds in weight, giving me very fair exercise for more than half-an-hour.

What an appetite the tramp over the boulders by the riverside gives you! How your legs ache after it when you return for your scrub and evening toilette. How your arms ache after wielding the immense double-handed rod. Was it not Sir Humphry Davy who said that there is no medium in anything, and that for his part gudgeon fishing from a punt on the Thames, and casting for salmon in a Scotch river, were the only two



forms of sport for which he cared? If so, he was more frank over his discovery than he was over one which he undoubtedly made and which has undoubtedly perished with him—I mean, of course, the artificial manufacture of the diamond.

At that time the scientific world had not taught us that ozone is one thing and oxygen another; and that ozone is to existence what champagne is to society—the one and only source of brilliancy and sparkle. But I had all the benefit of the ozone without knowing it, and soon began to feel a different man.

“The first requisite for success at the Bar,” said a very eminent judge, “is high animal spirits; and the second is high animal spirits; and the third is high animal spirits; and if to these a young man adds a little knowledge of law, it will not materially hamper him in his career.”

What is true of the Bar is true of the business of life, and I left the land of scones and salmon, cutlets and haggis, and Athole brose, feeling five hundred per cent. better, as a city man would say, than when I started for it. But there must be an end of all things, and it became time for me, with the end of August, to move south, as I had an invitation which it was for many reasons for my interest to accept, to spend the first of September, and as many days after as I might please, at the house of Lord Wessex, in Norfolk.

Thither I went, armed with the latest novelty in choke bores, with my muscles almost in the condition of those of a professional pedestrian, and with that happily balanced mind which comes of well-grounded self-content.

Wessex Hall was full, but a room had been reserved for me, which, I noticed with a smile, marked me out as a commoner of distinct eminence, in his own walk of life. You can pretty well tell the estimate people form of you by the kind of room in which they put you to sleep. I was on the first floor, and not among the gables. I looked out upon the lawn, and had the house with all its contents been my own, I could not have desired better quarters.

Ask any American what it is that his nation envies us most, and he will tell you at once that it is our country seats. Every New Yorker and Bostonian has his *villeggiatura*, but it is only in Virginia, as it was before the war, that you can find anything at all approaching to our English country house.

CHAPTER XV.

THE guests of Lord Wessex were much what might have been expected. There were from twenty to thirty men, and about as many ladies. There were neighbouring peers and squires. There was the latest literary lion, and the latest explorer, who this time came from Paraguay. There was an amateur yachtsman and circumnavigator, a Royal Academician, and a secretary from the American Legation, who, in addition to mixing cocktails and playing poker, was also a man of the stamp of Oliver Wendell Holmes—widely read, and himself an author of daily growing reputation.

But among the company there happened also to be Mr. Vivian, and with him Izzie. Mr. Vivian positively made for me, and wearied me with his grotesque effusion. He supposed I should be Lord Chancellor in the very next change of ministry, in fact, he had offered the Lord Lieutenant fifty to ten upon it, but his lordship had sagaciously shaken his head and said nothing, which looked as if the matter were a certainty. He was glad to see the law had not made me musty, nor turned my hair grey. He hated mustiness as he did

dissent and the devil. In short, the old gentleman played the part of Squire Western to perfection.

With her father was Izzie, who had certainly developed, and in many respects improved, since I saw her last. She had now ripened into a woman, with that indescribable bloom upon her, like the bloom on a bunch of grapes, which American ladies so envy their English sisters, and which no cosmetics can simulate.

When we joined the ladies after dinner it was clearly my duty to single her out, and, if I may indulge in a confusion of metaphors worthy of the Irishman, who said of his own speech, that it kindled a flame which completely drowned the eloquence of his antagonist, I resolved to be bold, and to take the bull by the horns.

"The last time I saw you, Miss Vivian, was, I think, at the Lyceum."

She blushed as red as any peony, and answered, "Yes."

"And I heard from you the next day."

This time she bowed her head.

"I hope," I said, with that vague assumption of interest usually employed for stopping gaps in conversation with trifles, "that you received the things I sent you safely?"

"Quite safely, thank you—all of them."

"The lady you saw me with was Mrs. Brabazon, of whom, I think, I have told you before. She was very kind to me, as kind as a mother could be, and when I was in immense difficulty—money difficulty—found it out and literally rescued me from ruin. I owe her everything in life—much more than my gratitude will ever be able to repay. But for her, my career would have been an utter failure."

"She was very beautiful, certainly," Izzie answered firmly; "but, Mr. Severn, I did not like what I saw, and I think I told you so in my letter."

"You did, with the most effective simplicity. It is some sort of pleasure to me now to be able to assure you that you were under a misapprehension."

"There was only one conclusion to come to that I could see," she answered defiantly, "and you ought not to blame me for having arrived at it. And where is Mrs. Brabazon now?"

"That is more than I can tell you. Her solicitors always know her address, and if I wanted to write to her, I should do so through them. She hovers about from place to place. I know that she is now abroad; but whether it is at St. Petersburg or Saratoga, at Vienna or Honolulu, I cannot tell you. I have heard nothing of her for some little time."

"I suppose you are great friends."

"That is hardly the word. She is one of the best

of women in the world, and the simplest; and it is a privilege for a man to be allowed to know her."

"When," said an old sergeant-instructor to his recruits at bayonet drill, "you have driven your weapon well in, give it a twist and a wriggle, and pull it out with a wrench to make the wound incurable."

These were exactly the tactics that I was pursuing, and it was pretty clear that they were producing the calculated effect.

After faltering for a few minutes, she said, very softly and quietly,—

"I think, Mr. Severn, you might have told me all this at the time."

"I should certainly have done so, if you had given me the chance, but you see you executed me first, passed sentence afterwards, and then, I suppose, proceeded to try the case in your own way. I know that is the method usually adopted with poachers by county squires, but I did not expect that their daughters adopted it in the most important matters of life."

"You are mocking me, Mr. Severn."

"I assure you most frankly that I am doing nothing of the kind. I am simply giving my own version of what has taken place. I have a clear right to do so, and it is a right I shall always exercise, both in this matter and in others, when I feel that there is any occasion for it."

"Then," she said, "Mr. Severn, I think we had better say no more about the matter."

"That is as you please," I retorted.

She made the slightest possible inclination of her head and joined a group of ladies at the other end of the room. I, looking round, perceived a knot of men, principally of a sporting turn, engaged in active conversation. I strolled up to them and found, of course, that they were discussing partridges, poachers, battue shooting, Irish setters, and the advantages and disadvantages of driving.

I did not care much about any of these things, being, although the son of a county squire, more or less a Gallio as to sporting discussions, in which no man ever convinces another, and hot argument often leads to hot temper. Being, however, appealed to as to the heinousness of poaching, I replied that, under the present system of preserving and turning down, I could see practically no difference whatever between a pheasant and a barn-door fowl, and that I would punish the man who stole the one in precisely the same manner, and upon precisely the same principle, as I would punish the man who stole the other.

This expression of opinion was not at all graciously received by one or two of the company, and the war of words broke out again with a vigour worthy of political controversy itself.

It is a characteristic of lawyers that they hate to argue a point unless they are paid to do so, and that their dislike to argument increases in exact proportion to the depth of their convictions upon the matter, if they happen to have any. So I evaded discussion, and contented myself instead with a study of human nature.

Later on the men adjourned to the smoking-room. The smoking-room at Wessex Hall was remarkably comfortable, and apt to tempt its occupants to late or rather to early hours. It was fitted very much like the smoking-room of a club, with leather arm-chairs, American rocking-chairs, marble-topped tables, and a sideboard, containing every requisite in the way of ice, claret, lemons, waters, both mineral and strong, a snuff box, and for those who might prefer such atrocities, a tobacco jar and clay pipes. Between a really good cigar, and a cool "churchwarden," there is, in my humble opinion, no *via media*, and this evening, in true Bohemian spirit, I selected a long clay, and mixed myself some whisky and water.

Lord Wessex, our host, was at his best in the smoking-room, where his natural geniality overcame every other element in him, whether inherited or acquired. He crossed the room and sat down by me.

"You must have thought me uncommonly rude, Mr. Severn, or uncommonly neglectful, but the house is so full that I hardly know where I am. I'm delighted to

have so good and keen a sportsman as yourself amongst us. The country is dull, no doubt, but I daresay you'll find it a change from London. Change of air does us all good. I know for myself, who am always stuck in the country, that a week in London seems to make a new man of me—shakes out the dust, I suppose, just as Londoners coming down here to us shake out the soot and smoke."

To this cheery broadside I made the most friendly responses, and I think fairly won my host's heart by complimenting him upon a short-horned bull I had noticed, which, as it turned out, was a very celebrated prize winner, and had lately obtained a gold medal at the county show.

He then kindly referred to a private bill, in which he had been personally interested to a very considerable extent, and in the navigation of which through committee I had rendered its promoters no little assistance—assistance handsomely recognised, but not the less valuable.

It was through this bill, in fact, that I first made Lord Wessex's acquaintance. He was a genial old gentleman, who looked sixty, but may have been older, with a ruddy, clean-shaved face, crisp curling locks almost white; cheerful, hazel eye, and a clear, ringing voice,—a typical English landed proprietor, with all the good qualities of his class, and, for all I know or care, all their prejudices as well.

"But I must introduce you to Lord Ashford," he said. "I don't think he's much of a lawyer, but he's a brother barrister all the same. He got called to the Bar because he said a county magistrate ought at least to know as much law as the clerk of the peace. He has travelled up the Nile and shot giraffe and hippopotamus, and is as modest about it all as possible. He brought back several waggon-loads of horns and hides; but when they told him he ought to write a book about his travels he laughed, and said that, if he told the truth, nobody would believe him, and that he really could not take the trouble to tell anything else."

Lord Ashford impressed me favourably. He was a typical Kentish giant, with an indolent manner, which I do not think was assumed, and beneath which evidently lay a considerable amount of determination and courage. I asked him, of course, how he liked partridges and pheasant after big game.

"Very much indeed," he replied. "Who was it—somebody that ought to know—who said that partridge shooting will remain our national sport long after every other form of sport, except perhaps angling, has died out. I've shot peacock and ostrich—both good birds in their way—but I still think that a chance kill right and left in a heavy turnip field is as good sport as any going."

Although no traveller, I still am, and then was, ar

enthusiastic reader of books of travel, which, in my opinion, are worth all the novels in the world, so that I was fairly able to keep up the conversation with him. But before long it veered round to other subjects, and ultimately we all began to gather into knots, previous to the final adjournment for the night.

"I can offer you no sport myself," I said, with a laugh. "There are sparrows near my chambers in the Temple, and I believe my office-boy practises at them with a blow-pipe, for I have detected him cooking them in a Dutch oven before the fire. We unhappy lawyers have little time for sport of any kind; and it is many years since you could catch roach and dace among the reeds at the bottom of the Temple Gardens. But I look forward to big game as just the possibility of the future, should I be able to give up work before my eyes dim, or my natural force abates." And with this Lord Ashford and I shook hands and parted for the night.

I threw my bedroom window wide open, and sat at it for some time, looking out on the moonlit lawn with its trim beds and its lawn-tennis ground and the tall elms at its foot. After all, what was my life to be like? It had been a success, no doubt; but what was it to be for me? For success in life by no means always secures happiness for the man who achieves it, any more than does wealth, which can purchase everything that is ex-

changeable, enable you to purchase health, or to do many things you wish to do, and which are hopelessly beyond your reach. Would it not be better, after all, to work for just a few years longer until I had "rounded off my little pile," and then retire with no definite object beyond that of enjoying myself in my own way? There would be the whole world before me, and I could roam in it like Browning's Waring—coming and going as I pleased; or should I hold on for the moral certainty and dull semi-drudgery of a judgeship, and apparel myself in imposing robes to decide knotty points of "stoppage in transitu," "bottomry bonds," "general average," and "contributory negligence"?

And as I pondered drowsily over these things a little bat flitted in at the open window, and hovered noiselessly about the room till it settled on the window curtains, where it hung itself up by its legs with its head downwards. "I wonder," said I to myself, "if the tiny creature is a familiar spirit bringing me good luck. Anyhow, it shall not be left to the tender mercies of the housemaid." So I captured it gently in the bottom of my hand, and turned it out again into the night. And then, myself, turned in with a dreamy kind of notion that I was not, after all, fairly justified in grumbling at the manner in which fortune up to now had treated me.

The man who expects nothing in this world is the

happiest of all, for the very sufficient reason that he is never disappointed. I had never expected much myself. My good fortune, such as it was, had, as it were, grown. It would have been an affectation to pretend that it was entirely undeserved; but it would be untrue to say that I had won it by any extraordinary course of merit or self-denial.

There is far more luck in this world than people imagine, and I had certainly had even more than my fair share of it.

Then I found myself falling asleep. The hoot of an owl—a bird with regard to which I entertain no superstitions or prejudices—roused me again for a moment, and I began to lay a plan for my next Long Vacation. I would secure Mrs. Brabazon, and charter a small steam yacht, and we would go cruising about the north-west coast of Scotland, shooting and fishing, and generally doing nothing, and with no definite plan.

The *dolce far niente*, when it has in it no tainting element of physical idleness, is distinctly the most delightful of all forms of human enjoyment. I have no patience with the men who go to Monte Carlo that they may sit all day under the palm trees in the marble terraces, and play all the evening at the tables. But healthy wholesome idleness, such as that of the yachtsman or the explorer, is the nearest approach to that ideal of happiness which the Greek philosophers were

always trying to accurately define, but could never present to us in an intelligible form.

The sun woke me in the morning streaming in at the window. I dressed myself, was out of the house before the shutters were open, and had a magnificent plunge in the neighbouring mill-pool. After which I repaired to the village hostel, the "Wessex Arms," where I chatted awhile with the daughter of the house, and solaced myself with a tankard of ale before rejoining the family circle at the formal breakfast.

Looking back now, I am perfectly conscious how much I owed at that time to my naturally fine physique, which I had never in any way abused, or even unduly strained. The man who can drink a pint of sound beer, and eat a good breakfast after it, can easily afford to give weight, and good weight too, in the race of life to his less fortunate competitors.

CHAPTER XVI.

BREAKFAST over, the company dispersed in genuine country-house fashion. The men, of course, were off to the turnips and the stubble, the women scattered anyhow. I, pleading my letters, was allowed to withdraw to the solitude of the billiard-room. I had sufficiently distinguished myself as a sportsman, and ingratiated myself by fair shooting and want of jealousy, to be able to believe that the regrets expressed at my absence from the party were actually sincere.

In the solitude of the billiard-room I began to take stock of the situation. It was very foolish of me; I admitted as much to myself, but I was undoubtedly in love with Izzie again. I knew this time, or at all events I believed, that I could reckon upon at least the benevolent neutrality of her father; and as regarded that best and truest of friends, Mrs. Brabazon, I had long since agreed with her original view of our relations, and was satisfied that our position had better remain that of sworn allies, offensive and defensive.

Izzie was undoubtedly now at her best; not at the prime of her beauty but in the full, rich spring of it.

The pear was ready to drop into my hand if I only tapped the bough. Besides there was a distinct impulse of chivalry in the matter which I should have been a cur indeed if I had not felt, for Izzie herself had been willing to take me as I stood when I had neither position, money, nor friends, and it was almost a point of honour to appeal to her again now that everything was secured. And my future, full of hope as it was, I could practically afford to regard with philosophical indifference.

The Lyceum difficulty was by no means insuperable. Evidently with a little tact it could be engineered, and, as I turned all these considerations over, I came to the conclusion that I would again apply for Izzie's hand, but, in proper strategical fashion and orthodox, have an interview with her father first.

So I decided to catch the old squire before breakfast the next morning, and with this virtuous resolution full upon me I got through some work, despatched my batch of letters, and then placidly waited for the dinner-bell.

I really forget whom it fell to my lot to take down to dinner, but I know it was not Izzie, who descended under the escort of Lord Ashford. She was evidently on the best of terms with him, and they were conversing through the whole of dinner, much after the fashion of a couple of love-birds. It was very wrong of me, of

course, to feel malice towards Ashford, who had done me no harm, and was quite innocent of any intention of doing so. But I could hardly resist an uncharitable and malicious desire to pick a quarrel with him, and a vague yearning, worthy only of a school-boy, to invite him to take off his coat and have it out.

I am perfectly aware that all these confessions tell very seriously against myself, but as I have before now observed, it is the very first duty of a historian, and much more of an autobiographer, to be strictly truthful.

Next morning I managed to secure my chance, and instead of seeing Mr. Vivian, found Izzie practically alone. I say alone, for she had only one companion, a lady of years of discretion, who had the good sense to invent some hopelessly unanswerable excuse and to retire. The coast thus clear, for a while at any rate, I opened fire at once:—

“Lord Ashford, Miss Vivian, seems at present the favoured recipient of those smiles and confidences which I once used to consider my own, and that too upon your own authority, which I presume is the very best.”

She flushed red with anger.

“Lord Ashford,” she retorted bitterly, “is more than a nobleman, Mr. Severn, he is a gentleman, and has never done anything to disgrace himself, or to forfeit the good opinion of any body.”

"Very possibly. I do not dispute it for a moment. I am not aware that I have ever done so myself."

"And I am not aware, Mr. Severn, how you can be sufficiently mean to pursue this cowardly system of persecution. I wish I had a brother, or any friend"—she laid an emphasis on this word,—“whom I could trust to take my part, or to call you to account, as you most richly deserve.”

"I am wholly unaware that I have done or said anything unworthy of a gentleman."

"Then your success, as I suppose I must call it, at the Bar must have turned your head, or you must have altered strangely under the influences of new friends and companions."

"I think if you would only listen to me patiently for a few minutes—"

"I could not listen patiently to you for a minute," she interrupted, with a gleam of angry light in her eyes, and a fierce stamp of her little foot upon the gravel. "I know all about you that you can tell me, and more than you would tell me. I have been careful to believe nothing that has not been sufficiently proved. Ask your own conscience, if you have any shreds of it left, and, if you have any sense of decency remaining, leave off persecuting me in this wicked way. You make my life unbearable."

The monstrous injustice of all this fairly amazed

me. I was, as I know, perfectly innocent of any persecution such as that laid to my charge, either in word, act, or even thought, but what on earth was I to say? or, if I said anything, of what possible avail would it be? I could only repeat very quietly, "I think at least you might listen to me for a minute or two."

"And I have told you once for all, that I decline to listen to you at all. Can you not take an answer? What a coward you are!"

"Miss Vivian, no man has ever yet dared to call me a coward."

"Possibly no man ever thought it worth his while. You are too utterly contemptible. Can you not believe me, when I tell you again that I despise you altogether—that the very sight of you is hateful to me? I am going. If you attempt to follow me, I shall appeal to the first man I see for help." And with these words she almost sprang to her feet, and walked rapidly away, availing herself of the very first turning in her path that hid her from my sight.

To have followed her would have been worse than foolish, so I thrust my hands deeply into my pocket, and walked slowly back towards the house, not so much thinking over the position which I could scarcely grasp, as marvelling at it, and at the extraordinary, and if the phrase be permissible, dogged, perversity of the female mind. I remember it occurring to me that an

American would almost certainly have described Miss Vivian's conduct as amounting to "downright cussedness," and laughing at the idea. But the laugh was more or less a forced one, and I was not sorry to find myself in the solitude of my own room, where the open window admitted the fresh, cool breeze, and the murmur, as Tennyson has it, of tremulous aspen trees, and poplars, with their noise of falling showers.

"I will think of nothing," I said to myself, "or I shall go wild." So I took down a stray volume from the shelves—I think it was *Nicholas Nickleby*—and made a gallant effort at reading. The attempt proved fairly successful. It was early in the morning, but I felt strangely tired and wearied. After a little bit the lines of print began to get confused, and I gave up the effort to follow them. Then I took to studying the pattern of the wall paper, and converting it into geometrical figures and combinations. This was a pleasant and dreamy work. After a little while, one particular piece of the pattern seemed to mesmerise me. I found myself staring at it vaguely, much like a mesmeric patient, staring at the zinc disc in the palm of his hand, and then I became happily conscious that I was falling asleep.

The room was so delightfully cool, and the whole atmosphere and surroundings were so somnolent, that I slept dreamlessly on, until a servant came with my

hot water in one hand, and on his other arm my neatly brushed and folded evening clothes. I woke with a start. It was half-past six, and time to dress for dinner. I felt little inclination to join the party. But I could not see my way to even a colourable excuse, so I languidly arrayed myself, and after a final and most refreshing ablution with eau de Cologne and water, made my way to the drawing-room.

The lady allotted to me was a sufficiently uninteresting person, the wife of a neighbouring squire, with voluminous views of her own as to rosemary tea and its virtues, the wickedness and danger of Dissent, the froward behaviour of the lower orders, and the vast amount of evil that had been done by educating the masses above their position. It was a trying ordeal, but I had to go through with it. I was never more thankful than when our hostess left, and the wine began to circulate, while the conversation turned on politics and local matters.

CHAPTER XVII.

I WOKE next morning none the worse for Lord Wessex's claret, and tumbling out of bed made my way towards the window, which I threw wide open.

I wonder why absurd people use the phrase "springing out of bed"? In the first place no man can spring out of bed were he to try ever so. If you doubt my assertion, make the experiment. You will find it as effectual as an attempt to sit down in a basket, and then to lift yourself up, basket and all, by the two handles.

It was a glorious September morning. The yellow and russet tints in the trees were only just beginning to show themselves. Nature was wide awake. The small birds were noisy in the trees. From a distant meadow I caught the strange grating note of the corncrake. On the lawn blackbirds and thrushes were hopping about in busy quest of lazy worms that had been lying out on the grass all night, and had loitered too long before withdrawing to the security of their burrows.

I still hold, and always shall, that the perfection of rural life is to be found in an English country house,

and for choice in the "sexes" and "folks" rather than in the shires, although Hampshire and Kent have no doubt claims of their own.

After drinking in the glorious morning air I rang my bell, retreating again between the sheets, and in due course the appointed servant made his appearance with my boots, clothes, water for my bath, and letters, and a large tumbler of hot milk. The house prided itself upon its dairy, and it was one of the institutions of the establishment, that a pint or so of fresh milk should be brought first thing each morning to the chamber of each guest.

I drank the milk and then I turned to the letters. With one exception, they were wholly unimportant. But the one letter in question so distinctly interested me, that, before I even commenced my toilette, I read it through three or four times as carefully as if it had been a case to advise, marked with a heavy fee, and an extra fee for expedition.

The envelope contained two letters. The first and the shorter was from Izzie herself.

"MR. SEVERN,—On consideration, I think it only right that I should send you this letter, which, as you see, is not anonymous. When you have read it, you may, if you choose, return it to me under cover to my

father; but please do not attempt to write to me, as I shall send back any letter of yours unread.

“ISABELLA VIVIAN.”

I did not know the handwriting of the second letter, which was voluminous, so I looked at the signature, and thus gathered that it came from that most venomous of spinsters, Miss M'Lachlan.

It was a long rigmarole about myself and Mrs. Brabazon, in which truth and falsehood were blended with such diabolical cunning, that even I, accustomed to the shiftiest of witnesses and the shadiest of tales, marvelled at the old hag's ingenuity.

Her story was, that while I had been an inmate of the select establishment of Mrs. Jessett, my conduct, and that of Mrs. Brabazon, had been so outrageous, flagrant, and shameless, that the worthy old dame had been compelled one evening to turn us both at a minute's notice out of the doors. Everybody in the house had known that I was in debt, and everybody knew also that Mrs. Brabazon had paid my debts and made me an allowance, and that, in fact, I had occupied the position of her *amant de cœur*.

How the miserable liaison had ended, Miss M'Lachlan had not taken the trouble to inquire. She had no doubt it was still going on, as we had always seemed to glory

in our infamy, and to be disposed to defy the opinion, not of decent people merely, but of the world at large. For her own part, she had been strictly brought up, and when she saw sin—she might say flagrant sin—she felt it a sacred duty not to spare the sinner. Her only prayer was, that these words of warning might not arrive too late, and that my soul through tribulation and penitence might yet perhaps be plucked as a brand from the burning.

How the information had reached the vicious old woman, that Izzie and I might possibly renew our early vows, the letter discreetly omitted to state; but there was, as usual in the letters of women, a peculiarly venomous postscript, assuring Izzie that while at Bayswater, I had, to the disgust of the other inmates of Mrs. Jesset's establishment, committed the unpardonable sin of Monaldeschi against Christina of Sweden, and had ridiculed, and worse than ridiculed her (Izzie) to Mrs. Brabazon publicly, and in the hearing of everybody.

As Miss Vivian had not insisted that the letter was to be returned, I sealed it carefully up and deposited it securely in my despatch box. "Susan shall see it before I return it, at any rate," I said to myself. And with this determination in my mind, I dismissed the whole matter from my thoughts, and sallied serenely down to breakfast. Before going down, however, I

carefully packed up my things, and made every preparation for my departure.

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I was early in the dining-room, but I found my hostess there, and it was easy enough to plead a sudden recall to the Temple on my old standing excuse—the great Scotch Salmon Fisheries Case. Then I took a seat near the door, and waited till Izzie came in. She seated herself as far as possible from me, hurried through her meal, and then, trusting, I suppose, that I should not speak to her, rose and made a move towards the door.

There may have been about half-a-dozen persons in the room, without reckoning the servants. I did not trouble to count the heads. When she saw that I was in her path, she stopped and drew herself up to her full height, looking defiantly at me. I, for my part, said the few words I had to say in a clear, dull monotone, as distinct as that of a young High Church curate telling us how “the Scripture moveth us in sundry places.”

“Miss Vivian,” I said, “the letter which you have enclosed to me is from beginning to end a tissue of lies. The woman who wrote it is as vulgar and illiterate as she is malicious. You must surely have noticed that she cannot even spell correctly. I shall keep the letter a little longer, as, unless I change my

present intention, I shall prosecute her, and have her punished for writing and sending it. That, I think, is a duty I owe to the lady whom this Miss M'Lachlan has so foully traduced. Otherwise, I should take no notice of the matter."

Then I stepped on one side, and Izzie hurried by me with her face scarlet. I waited a couple of minutes to give her fair and reasonable law, and then made my way off myself.

In less than an hour I was on my road to London, unable to shut my eyes to the comic side of what had happened, but distinctly determined to punish Miss M'Lachlan if I possibly could, and to punish her effectually. For, as Macchiavelli says in his *Principe*, it is worse than idle to scotch a snake. If the business has to be done, put your heel upon the venomous creature's head, and grind it into slime. These are not his exact words, but they sufficiently convey my meaning.

Arrived in London, I inspected the letters and circulars which had accumulated during my absence. As I had become a methodical man, there was nothing of any importance, or in any way calculated to startle me or even quicken my pulse. But there was a short letter from Susan Brabazon, as indeed the handwriting told me at once. It was characteristically like her, and so brief, that I can afford to reproduce it.

"Write me as fully as time permits with news of yourself. It makes me feel younger to hear that you are flourishing. I have nothing to trouble or annoy me, and often wish I could have you with me again for an hour or so. To have you with me always would be pleasant enough for me, but utter ruin for you. A letter will find me at the Poste Restante, Venice, for which quaint city I am just starting. I have had such a thing in my life as a donkey ride at Scarborough, and I am curious to try one on the Lido. Besides, I may perhaps meet the Wandering Jew, who, as you know, makes Venice his head-quarters. Addio, my dear boy. When the Courts are sitting, I always study the Law Reports in the *Times*; and only the other day I sat next a large Leghorn shipowner at *table d'hôte*, who knew you perfectly well, although he had never seen you. He had been interested in some case of running-down at sea, which he said you had managed admirably, and he compared you to Grotius, and a great number of other gentlemen of whom I have never heard. I consequently begin to see that you must be making your way, although England is, of all countries, the one that is the most difficult for a young man.—Yours ever,

"SUSAN BRABAZON."

This dear letter, like the writer in every line of it.

I answered at considerable length—writing fully, freely, carelessly and truthfully. And in the course of my epistle, I mentioned the M'Lachlan episode, and enclosed Miss M'Lachlan's own letter.

I do not know precisely in what the charm consisted, but Susan Brabazon was a woman to whom it was a positive pleasure even to write, just as it is pleasant to wake up at night and listen to the murmur of the sea, although you cannot see it, and it may be miles away. I did up my letter with special care in a stout linen envelope, sealed it with ostentatious profusion of wax, registered it and posted it, and then turned my mind once again to business matters, and more especially to the deeply-interesting case of Wilkins, Stubbles, and Others against the London and North-Western Railway Company—a case of which it was very difficult to get at the rights, as both parties were obstinately in the wrong, and had already wasted in litigation about twenty times the value of the wretched quarter of an acre of land that was the *causa teterrima belli*.

There was still a good month left of the Long Vacation, so I thrust the voluminous documents *in re* Wilkins, Stubbles, and Others into my portmanteau, and ran down to Essex.

I found my father, as I might have expected, older than I had last seen him, and with marked symptoms

of shakiness; but he was pleased to see me, and it was some sort of a pleasure to talk over his affairs with him, and to put him straight—for, of course, he was overdrawn again at the County Bank.

Then, too, there were my sisters, who were unfeignedly glad to see me, and not at all averse to a few stray bank-notes secretly and judiciously planted. For my mother I had brought down some special presents—a Cashmere shawl, some tea, given me by an *attaché* at the Russian Embassy, and one or two other such trifles. Trifles they seemed to me, but marvels to the dear old lady.

I was thus a welcome guest, and as I gave no trouble, and was content to roam about with my walking-stick, or my gun, and do nothing, I have no doubt that they were all fully as glad to have me with them as they professed themselves to be.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I MIGHT have stopped longer in Essex had I not received a letter from an eminent firm of solicitors and parliamentary agents in Victoria Street, Westminster, informing me that Sir Joseph Chivery, forty years member for the ancient loyal and thoroughly whatever-way-you-may-please-in-politics constituency of Pullborough, had fallen dead on his hearthrug in an apoplectic fit, after a more than usually hearty breakfast of Scotch haddock and devilled kidneys. Pullborough wanted a member whose political views, whatever they might be, were identical in every respect with its own, and it was perfectly ready to be convinced at a day's notice, and subject to satisfactory references that I was the very man of whom it had always been in quest as its ideal representative.

When matters are put plainly and straightforwardly like this, business is amazingly simplified. I ran down to Pullborough; saw the local magnates, who did me the honour of dining with me at the principal hotel—the “Goat and Bagpipes”—and so, conciliated their good graces, that a few weeks later I found myself re-

turned member for Pullborough without opposition, and charged with the responsible duty of representing and protecting in Parliament the interests of that upright and patriotic constituency.

The whole thing did not cost four hundred pounds, and I have always thought that it was cheap at the money.

Then I had to hurry back to town, where there was plenty for me to do, as term had begun, and my table in the inner room was covered with papers. My hack had been out at grass, and was back freshly clipped and shod and the picture of health; and it was a pleasure to dine once again at my club off the joint and a pint of claret, and to smoke a quiet cigar afterwards over the usual shilling pool with sixpenny lines. What a singular delusion it is that clubs are nests of extravagance and self-indulgence.

My terminal work was of the usual kind—ponderous, dull, and lucrative. There were the Conservators of the Slush Estuary against the Slush and Puddlecombe Local Board, with the free fishermen of Puddlecombe and its Liberties intervening. There were oyster beds concerned in this case, and the fees were proportionately luscious. There was the Slopshire Main Drainage Board against the Mayor and Corporation of Sloperton and Sludgeborough; and there was the *Queen of the West* against the *Bessie Belford*, with the

Polly Jane intervening for salvage, which had fought its way right up from the local Admiralty Court at Liverpool.

It is difficult to give any idea how interesting a heavy case is, and how delightful it is to find yourself rising above the level of Bardell and Pickwick, and freed from interpleader for the higher mysteries of Stoppage in Transitu.

Most of my work was now A B C to me, as I knew my law reports up to date, and kept myself as current with them as does a surgeon in any practice with his hospital reports, and his weekly *Lancet*. So I consequently welcomed the work with pleasure, and set myself down to the mass of papers with a voracity that gladdened the soul of my senior clerk, a stout gentleman, with a clean-shaved face, a heavy gold watch chain, a repeater, and an elaborately chased snuff-box.

I thus had my day fully taken up, but I made it a sacred rule from which nothing short of a consultation with the Treasury solicitors would make me deviate, that I did no work after seven, or at any rate only such work as I could do in my easy-chair, and as involved no tedious and troublesome interviews. I was consequently enabled to dine out as often as I pleased, and I must confess that I had now developed a weakness for dining out. A dinner in a really well-appointed house is almost always better than the very

best that can be set before you at the most expensive hotel; and however brilliant the display of plate, and however gorgeous the liveries of the lacqueys, there is yet a distinct air of home about the whole thing, bringing it pleasantly near to reality.

Among my earliest invitations after my return to town, was one from the American Legation, to which, of course, I returned an acquiescent answer; and it was thus that I met and had to take down to dinner Miss Elizabeth Maria Jemima Rock, daughter of Cyrus Napoleon Washington Q. Rock of Rockburg, U.S.

Mr. Cyrus Napoleon Washington Q. Rock had "struck oil," and his operations were now pumping it up at the rate of heaven knows how many hundreds of hogsheads a day. He did a ready-money business in the precious product of the earth, complacently realising his little pile every week, and banking with the Lafittes in Paris and the Bank of England in London.

What he was worth no one exactly knew. It was doubtful whether he knew himself; for the oil kept squirting up like a geyser, and his only outlay was for cooerage and transport, or rather for cooerage only, leaving transport and freight to be paid by his assignees.

He was not at all a vulgar man, or of a shoddy type, or possessed of the idea that the world revolves on its axis subject always to the constitution of

United States. He was a shrewd, hard-headed man, of much the same type as Brassey and Stephenson, and he had taught himself many things. He was a very good judge of pictures and of china, and bought both largely.

He did not race or hunt, but no Yorkshireman could have got the better of him in a bargain over a pair of carriage horses or a high-stepping cob. He lived at hotels because, as he frankly said, he hated the worry of an establishment of his own; and he drove four-in-hand with all the skill of a post-master in the art.

"I drove the mail in Kentucky when I was a lad," he used to remark. "Bad roads, one bolter, two jibbers, and a kicker. That was my average team. I guess that gives you practice. In those days I always had to carry a small store of traces and lashes and running gear in my boot, and so many bars slung up behind that the back of the coach looked like a butcher's shop on strike. Yes, sir, you bet I've learnt to drive. Go your bottom dollar on that speculation. And now let's have a cool cocktail and a little shilling poker."

Miss Rock, as I could soon find out, was one of the best types of American girls. She had read everything,—Shakspeare, Herbert Spencer, Zola, Goethe, Prescott, and De Tocqueville, of course, and was *au courant* with all the light surge of modern literature.

She had views of her own about the Italian opera; the higher education of women; the Canadian fisheries question; the descent of man from the gorilla; the claims of the Vatican, and the latest novelty in double stars.

And yet she was not garrulous nor even tiresome in the least degree, for, under all her chatter,—if it deserved the name—ran a rich vein of shrewd human and genial common sense, combined with what you very seldom find in a girl of her age, tolerably accurate information as to facts.

I can hardly describe her to do her justice. She was dressed expensively, and not at all extravagantly, her only ornament being of plain gold. I think she wore what ladies call white tulle, picked out with branches of natural gloire de Dijon and stephanotis, but I will not pledge my memory to such particulars.

Her figure and features had not that excessive delicacy, amounting almost to fragility, so common among her country-women. On the contrary, she was bright and healthy, without being in any way aggressively robust. Nor was there the least tinge of even Bostonese in her accent—that tinge which made Holmes remark in despair that everybody in Paris speaks English, except, of course, the wealthier Americans.

We talked at first upon every conceivable subje

Then she settled down upon England, and I had to run a gauntlet of questions.

"I have read my Murray, of course, Mr. Severn, and my Baedeker, and papa has ordered in piles of photographs and guide books, but I'll tell you what I want to see."

"What is that?" I asked in curiosity.

"Well, I've seen the Tower, of course, and Windsor Castle, and Westminster Abbey, and St. Paul's, and the Docks, and the British Museum. But I want someone to find me a guide who will take me over London, and show me the old places in Dickens—the old curiosity shop, and Mr. Pickwick's lodgings in Goswell Street, and Newgate Prison, and the opium den in Ratcliffe Highway, and Saffron Hill, where Fagin had his thieves' lodging-house and academy. I suppose you have guides to do all that kind of thing?"

I had to explain to her astonishment that London is absolutely destitute of professional guides.

"Oh, never mind. We must advertise for one in the *Times*. I daresay he'll turn up. And then papa always lets me have my own way, and so we're going to Warwick, and Kenilworth, and Tintern, and Harlech, and Furness, and Abbotsford, and, of course, to Killiecrankie. I guess Killiecrankie isn't up to Niagara any more than Windermere to Erie, or Snowdon to the Rockies, but I mean to do my England off the reel,

and make a 'square job of it before I recross the old herring pond."

It was impossible to resist her intense flood of high spirits. I agreed with her that she had got a large business on hand, but opined that with resolution it could be put through, and the contract completed in a shorter time than might have been expected.

"Well, now, you're comforting. I met a young man last evening who parted his hair down the middle, and talked about culture and all that kind of show. What do you think he said? Guess now? 'Miss Rock,' said he—and pulled a face as long as a stump orator orating to three niggers, a washer-woman on strike, and a bubbly-jock—'Miss Rock, you must live in England for years. Its beauties and its treasures must grow into your existence and become a part of you. They are to be approached reverently and tenderly, not to be rushed past by almost sacrilegious feet. They are hallowed with traditions that come down to us through the mist of ages, like the voice of the Pythia chanting from her tripod through the fumes of the Delphic cavern.'"

"And what did you say?" I inquired.

"Well, I felt sort of irritated at being preached to, so I just said, 'O Jerusalem! Snakes and snapping turtles!'"

Our eyes met with a full flood of mischievous merriment, and we burst out laughing heartily.

"But look here now. It's time for us ladies to be getting. I suppose I shall see you after your wine. In the States the ladies stop. We exercise a sort of holy influence, and keep the men's minds away from trotting matches, and time bargains, and Ward politics. That's our mission, that is, and we put it through as straight as need be."

Over the few glasses of claret and the coffee that followed I found myself very little occupied with the general conversation, and more interested in listening to Mr. Rock, who, after the fashion of his nation, launched out at some length upon things in general.

He was a Federalist, with no personal bitterness against the South, and spoke with reverence of Lee and Jackson, more especially of "old Stonewall," whose dogged courage had evidently won his heart. With him, somehow, I made favourable progress, and so won his heart, that he asked me to dine with him the day after next at the Hotel Continental, where he was at present located, and to meet one or two American friends, principally city men in large American houses, but, as he emphatically remarked, "Sterling."

Then we went upstairs, and I very shortly took my parture; but before I went I ascertained from Miss Rock that she was willing to wait for three weeks until

the Courts rose, and to then allow me to act as a *cicerone* to herself and her father through those parts of London, at any rate, which she was anxious to see. And next afternoon I procured editions of Dickens and Thackeray, which I marked and dog's-eared at the appropriate places, and so sent them round to her with another treasure which I had long seen at Quaritch's—a large folio full of old plates and engravings, collected from every quarter and pasted down scrap-book fashion, with the text of Peter Cunningham dexterously fitted in as a running commentary.

And then came the Conservators of the Dee, and the Plumstead Local Board, and the Mersey Dock Extension, and the humble appeal of Rumtjee Cursitjee Chunderlal against the judgment of the Supreme Court of Calcutta, in favour of his Highness the Rajah of Runderpore and others—a tough case, of which even the litigants themselves did not profess to understand the rights, but over which they had sworn by all the shrines of Benares to fight the matter out before the great Empress of the East herself, down to the last rupee in their respective cumberbunds.

CHAPTER XIX.

My consignment of books having been duly despatched to the Continental, I made my appearance there at the appointed time. The company was mixed, but good. There was a racing peer with a name absolutely above suspicion on the turf, and with a penchant for trotting horses, and a Scotch peer who was shortly on his way to see what could be done in the shape of sport on the slopes of the Alleghanies and the Rockies. There was a yachtsman, owner of a schooner well known in the Mediterranean, and enthusiastic on the vexed questions of centre-boards and measurement-tonnage. There was one of our best known journalists and best of all *raconteurs*, who is perhaps even more popular in the States than in London itself. There were some city men—shrewd, intelligent speculators in stocks, timber, cotton, tinned provisions, and steel rails.

Some of these brought their wives, some their daughters. We made about forty, all told, but although the party was large it was most harmonious, and, as far as possible, united.

The lady allotted to my share was the wife of a

gentleman who had done a good stroke of business, by making "a corner" in pickled pork, at Chicago, and had now retired upon his "pile." Three years before he had ruined himself, and the bulk of his friends, by an attempt to engineer a corner in molasses; but when the pork turned up a "straight hand," he had paid all his old creditors a hundred red cents in each dollar, which, as his wife told me, was more than any of them ever expected, or, for the matter of that, deserved.

"But Hiram's got his pile now, I calculate," continued the worthy lady, with pardonable pride, "and I reckon he's learnt enough by this time to sit as steady on it as an old rooster. Money's a good egg, Mr. Severn, sir, and it's my fixed idea that it ought to be laid in a warm nest."

I expressed my entire concurrence in these most practical sentiments, and she then insisted on my telling her all I knew about the private habits and mode of life of the Royal family, and of one or two of our principal dukes and marquises.

It was impossible to classify her as a bore,—she was so entirely natural and vivacious, with not a taint in her endless chatter of her own personality.

Before leaving I managed to hunt out Miss Rock again, and under the excuse of piloting her through the difficulties of procuring a final Neapolitan ice,

with its essential adjuncts of wafer and still champagne, had another opportunity, of which I carefully availed myself to, at all events, form the materials, for thoroughly making up my mind about her.

Then I returned to Chapel Street, and before turning in, considered matters on my sofa, with the aid of seven feet of cherry stem, without a flaw, and a huge lump of anatolia clay of the purest quality, the gift of some Greek merchants in the city, in whose matters I was standing counsel.

Tobacco, when it is good, mild and cool, aids reflection most essentially. The normal pulse of a man in the prime of life should beat from seventy to seventy-five times in the minute. So at least physicians tell us. Many great men have had pulses abnormally slow. Napoleon's heart hardly beat faster than that of a reptile. Shelley's pulse, if he were only betrayed into conversation, would at once mount to ninety. His blood was always dashing itself in angry surges against the walls of his heart. Those whom the gods love die young. He would have died of heart disease if the sea, which he so loved, had not claimed him for her own.

I, not being a Shelley, was able to enjoy my pipe complacently, and to watch with interest the ring of smoke edging up from the bowl to the ceiling, and I

was also able to think things over. Should I offer my hand to Miss Rock? I need have no false shame in doing so. I could stipulate that every dollar of her fortune should be unconditionally settled on herself, with full power to her to deal with it as she might please, and without even a nominal sum to be settled on me.

I should insist on these terms in any case, as they would put my motives absolutely above suspicion. And then, too, I could very well afford to make them. I had quite enough money of my own securely invested, upon which to retire to my Tusculan villa, or my Sabine farm, at any moment that I might please. Four hundred a year—to take a low estimate of my financial position, were I to leave off practice at once, and to live on the interest of my capital saved—is not a fortune, of course. But what is more than a pound a day, is a sufficient competence for any man, unless he wish to live at Vienna, or to have an *entresol* in the Avenue de l'Opéra. Besides, I had no intention of retiring, being hardly yet in the summer of life, and as fond of my work for its own sake, as if it were salmon fishing or deer stalking.

So I decided to begin by tackling old Rock in person, without any waste of time. For Americans have a fancy for titles, as they have for bric-à-brac, and London has only too many impecunious peers only too

anxious to pick up what it pleases them, in their impertinence, to call a shoddy nugget.

So I invited Mr. Rock to dine with me at White's, to which club I now belonged, and when, as it happened, a certain very distinguished royal Personage was dining that evening with one or two other distinguished royal Personages, and a sprinkling of Serenes, at a table next but one to our own.

This pleased Mr. Rock immensely. "It is incorrect, sir," he said, "to say that you English are exclusive, sir,—it is not so. Sir, here am I, Cyrus Napoleon Washington Q. Rock, of Rockburg, U.S., dining in his own club, with the Heir-Apparent to the Throne of the Plantagenets, and the Tudors and the Stuarts at the next table but one. Sir, it does me proud, and I thank you for myself and my country, for your hospitality and for this occasion. I shall wire it, sir, to Rockburg, and they will make an editorial of it there in the *Daily Bulletin*."

I expressed my satisfaction at Mr. Rock's delight, and then began cautiously to feel my way towards the business of the evening. This we did not reach until we were almost the only occupants of the smoking-room, when the waiter had fixed a mint julep completely to Mr. Rock's approval, and vastly to his own. Then with what diplomacy I could, and with commendable brevity, I opened my case to him, carefully dwell-

ing on the point that money was no object whatever to me, and that if it were made a condition, I should not object to giving up my profession, and becoming a naturalised citizen of the United States, although it had always been my ambition to wear the English ermine, if only for a term, and that prize was now practically within my reach.

Mr. Rock closed his eyes for a minute or two, and, I presume, meditated. Then he opened them and took a square look at me. Then he opened his mouth and began what he had to say in the most unembarrassed manner possible, but with the broad accent peculiar to him, when he meant what he was saying.

"Well, Mr. Severn, you are a smart young man, and as handy, and you come of a family as good as most peerages, and you've chumped your sawdust without butter or molasses, and you've made yourself what you are. I can respect you for that. I'm a self-made man myself. My neighbours tell me it relieves the Almighty of a very great responsibility. Perhaps it may, although it isn't for me to perch on the top of my own pile, and crow to the parish. But I like you, Mr. Severn. There must have been grit in you all along, and there's plenty of it now. I don't want a good marriage for my gell, though no doubt you are well enough off. What I want to find for her is a man who'll behave fair and square and honourable to her, and I'm inclined to think that

those are your views and your sentiments. And, so far, the coast is clear. Now, hev you, or hev you not been making signals to her in the offing?"

I was enabled to assure Mr. Rock, with a most perfect sincerity, that, intentionally at any rate, I stood entirely guiltless of any such piratical practices.

"Wal, squire," rejoined Mr. Rock, "then I'll speak to my gell about this biz to-morrow morning, and if she says 'Yes,' Cyrus Napoleon Washington Q. Rock will be the last man under the star and stripes to shove in his oar and say 'No.' On that deal you hev my fist. I guess from what I've seen with my eyes half open, that my gell will say 'Yes.' She allus did like you Britishers. But go bail for her, I can't. And it's too much to expect of any parent in these onnatral days. I'll let you be posted up, squire, in due course; and now, if I may trespass on your hospitality, I should like that smart young waiter to fix me just another julep."

So the julep was "fixed" and solemnly consumed, and Mr. Cyrus Napoleon Washington Q. Rock and I took leave of each other in the portals of White's on the most friendly terms.

CHAPTER XX.

NEXT afternoon I received a brief communication from Mr. Rock.

“DEAR SIR,—I enclose a letter from my daughter.
—Yours truly,
“CYRUS NAPOLEON WASHINGTON Q. ROCK.”

The letter from Miss Rock was equally characteristic.

“DEAR MR. SEVERN,—I shall be in to-day after five, as papa is going to dine with one or two city men, with whom he is running a little plant, which he says will turn out a straight flush. Chip in if you will at the Continental any time after five, and I should very much enjoy it, if you would take me to some show.—Yours sincerely,

“ELIZABETH M. J. ROCK.”

To this I sent a trusty messenger with an answer, and made my appearance at Mr. Rock's hotel at the

time appointed. Miss Rock received me with a most cordial shake of the hand, not at all masculine, but as simple and unaffected as the ring of her voice—the slight American intonation in which was just sufficiently perceptible to be piquant.

“Well, Mr. Severn,” she said, “my father’s given me *carte blanche* in this deal, and I think I know how I’m going to play it. But it’s going for the bank, you know, and it wants consideration. I haven’t quite clearly fixed my mind up, and it’s no good pretending I have; but I sha’n’t keep you waiting off and on longer than is really fair and reasonable. A fortnight deferred isn’t much of a couple of valuable lives, and I’m not the girl to make up my mind on such a matter in less than a fortnight.”

“A most reasonable time allowance,” I answered, with my best smile, and a bow which would have been wasted on a Lord Chancellor on the Woolsack.

“Well, I don’t say it is, and I don’t say it isn’t, but it’s what I want, and, now as you are here to-night, and I mean if you can spare the time to skip around a bit, suppose you take me somewhere.”

“What will Mr. Rock say?” I gently urged. “Of course I shall be perfectly delighted.”

“Say? What should he say? Why! very much obliged to you for your attention and kindness to an ignorant young Yank like me.”

"Would Mr. Rock mind my taking you out to dinner?"

"Not a cent; and I wouldn't mind coming. But, suppose you dine here, and let's skip round to the play afterwards. You can send a messenger for your clothes, and we'll do the thing like citizens with a stake in our respective countries."

I, of course, said I was only too charmed, and sent a messenger at once for my evening apparel. Being Miss Rock's guest, I had naturally to accept her place of entertainment and her bill of fare. Both were excellent. With genuine American tact, she chose the public coffee-room. The bill of fare displayed, as I knew, a full acquaintance with Saratoga; for it included hot boiled lobster—a dish practically unknown in England—and also baked oysters. I concluded that the superintendence of Mr. Rock's banquets at Delmonico's and elsewhere had been one of the pleasant and daughterly methods by which Miss Rock had lightened his labours. Apart altogether from the fact that I already entertained towards her feelings wholly distinct from those of friendship, her versatility and general *savoir faire* impressed me wonderfully.

To the Criterion we ultimately repaired. The piece was of the ordinary Criterion, or, to be perhaps more exact, Palais Royal type. It was, if I remember rightly *The Wife with Two Mothers-in-Law*, or something

the sort. Of course, all the peculiarly Parisian humour of the French original had of necessity been strictly excised, but there was sufficient movement to atone for want of genuine incident, and sufficient sprightliness of dialogue to enable the actors to dispense with gag.

Honestly, I can declare that I enjoyed myself, and I am sure that my companion was equally pleased, for she was entirely silent and attentive beyond laughter during the progress of the piece itself, and vigorously earnest about its merits during the intervals between the acts.

When we returned to the hotel, we found that Mr. Rock had not yet arrived, having, as the hall porter informed us, gone out to see the conclusion of a big billiard match, in which he was much interested; so, at her request, I went upstairs with his daughter to await his arrival.

"Papa won't be long," said Miss Rock. "Wait and see him; it will please the old man. He's as regular as a rooster, and won't keep us beyond the proprieties."

"Regular as a rooster" Mr. Rock arrived within rather less than five minutes. He nodded to his daughter and shook hands with me.

"Wal, squire, I suppose you've been taking my gell and. Gells give a power of trouble; I know her dearer did, and I know she takes after her mother.

It's kind of you to interest yourself in this way, and I take it as a compliment—not to my dollars, sir, but to an American citizen.”

“Always talking about your dollars, papa,” interrupted Miss Rock.

“Wal!” retorted her parent, jerking the bell vigorously, “what else have I got to talk about? Not you anyhow, though you're as dootiful a gell as need be. I'm not an educated man. I'm not a gentleman. I don't reckon any friends in Borston. I haven't been there yet to see the hub of the universe sticking out like the bottom of a teacup in a pumpkin pie. That's a flush. But I like this old country, and I like you, sir, if it isn't a liberty to say so a second time on so short an acquaintance. When a Britisher runs square, he's squarer than any man on the track. There's no psalm-smiting and foot-shuffling about him. I won't go so far as to say Bunker's Hill wasn't a blunder. But the checks have been handed in over that little show, and the job's over. Hammer down to the highest bidder.”

Here Mr. Rock, who had imbedded his hand in his shirt front, and was planted on the hearth-rug with his other hand under his coat tails, stood like Brutus, and paused for a reply. The reply was a ripple of laughter, which his minor raised to a perfect peal. Then I said that I thought I must be going.

"We'll have a sling before we go, squire, to show there's good feeling, and you just consider yourself free of my location to come in and out as you please. The details of this little biz will, I suppose, have to be fixed up; but if all goes well, you and my gell will be equal to that emergency. And I cannot help a remark. New York is a fine city, so is New Orleans. So for the matter of that is 'Frisco, bar those misbegotten sons of Chinese. So Rockburg will be when it's located out. But give Cyrus Napoleon Washington Q. Rock London, before all the cities in the universe,—now that Niniveh and Babylon are disestablished and disendowed."

Soon after I took a most friendly leave, and so ended my first evening in the domestic circle—if two points can fix the locus of a circle, which geometricians deny—of Mr. Rock.

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Fortunately the London Christmas that year was fine. There was no fog, no rain, and no mud, and hardly any frost of which to speak. I was consequently able to fulfil my promise to the letter, and I took Miss Rock to really everything in London and every place in London that an American of an inquiring turn of mind and anxious to "put his London through," would wish to see.

Let me give a short list by way of sample. Of course there were the Docks and the British Museum, Westminster Abbey, and the Tower, and similar places, most of which she had visited, but very imperfectly. Then there was the Mint and the Monument, and Billingsgate Market; and there were a number of quaint little places—the Halls of the City Companies, to one of which I was standing counsel; and Newgate, and St. John's Gate at Clerkenwell, and the old red tower at Canonbury.

Mr. Rock, too, was interested in places even where their authenticity was doubtful, such as the old Jamaica Coffee-house and Great St. Helen's and the Barbican. We actually included Primrose Hill in the round of our investigation, not forgetting Hampstead Heath and the Spaniards. We spent the best part of an afternoon in St. Martin's Lane, Leicester Square, Soho, and the "Convent Garden." We dived into Southwark, and visited the Tabard, which had not then been demolished. We explored Chelsea, and endeavoured to identify Don Saltero's and the Old Bun House. I think I left no nook untried, and I know that my services were fully appreciated.

Amongst other things—for Americans take a great interest in criminal cases—we visited the locality of several famous murders, such as Great Coram Street, Saffron Hill, the Hen and Chickens in the Borough

and others. We dived into crypts, wasted many precious minutes over monuments and inscriptions, spent a whole afternoon in what was once Grub Street and its neighbourhood, and otherwise, as Mr. Rock expressed it, so "petered our London out that a gross of Chinamen couldn't extract a dollar piece from the refuse."

"I shall go back to Rockburg, sir," said Mr. Rock "a prouder man and a taller by a considerable number of inches. I will not, sir, compare myself to the travelled monkey in the fable of your fellow-countryman, Goldsmith, with whose Vicar of Wakefield I am as well acquainted as with Knickerbocker's History of New York; but you have travelled me a bit, Mr. Severn. You have expanded the map, and I am much obliged to you, sir."

All's well that ends well.

Meantime, the allotted period of probation drew to its conclusion, and I was not astonished to receive one morning a brief and characteristic letter from Miss Rock.

"DEAR MR. SEVERN,—I think we have seen enough of each other to come to an opinion, unless either of us is keeping back a secret. I know it is not so with me, and I would believe no one who said it was so of you. I think you may come round to the Con-

tinental as soon as you like without troubling your mind. We shall both be glad to see you.

"I like England so well that I am more than content to take it up for a permanency. It's the difference between a prairie and a flower garden, but I have my fancies for the flower garden.—Yours always sincerely,

"ELIZABETH M. T. ROCK."

I read the letter through, pocketed it, told my clerk that I should not return till the next morning, and in really less than ten minutes was at the Hotel Continental.

We dined *en famille* that night, and an extremely happy party we made. I was triumphant, Mr. Rock serene and satisfied, and Elizabeth tranquil and radiant.

We talked about everything except ourselves, and before I left, by way of making the thing a solemn family party, we actually indulged in a little three-handed euchre, much to the amazement of the waiter, who apparently "did not understand" the game. Then I took my departure, Mr. Rock evincing his sense of impending relationship by very nearly crushing my hand and dislocating my arm, and I found myself on the flags in front of the Royal Academy, not a rich man only, but practically a millionaire.

Yes, my whole life was now closed, except so far

as ambition might guide or caprice be able to tempt me. I should have at my command money more than sufficient to carry out any deliberate plan of action or any sudden impulse. I knew that so it was, and yet I think I hardly realised the fact until I found myself in my bedroom trying to get to sleep upon the events of the day, and for some time failing signally in the effort.

But I slept soundly, nevertheless, and arose next morning ready for my before-breakfast ride, from which I returned with my muscles braced, my blood bounding through my veins, and an indefinite horizon open to my vision.

Had I, after all, been more industrious, or more deserving than other young men, or was it simply that fortune had favoured me?

I philosophically decided that my gratitude was entirely due to fortune, and I astonished the groom who was waiting for my horse by giving him a sovereign along with the usual nod in recognition of his salute.

"May your honour have all the luck your honour deserves," said the man in question, whose name happened to be Flanagan, "and may the Blessed Virgin and all the holy Saints look after your honour and keep your honour from the cess and the trouble."

And I believe that Mr. Flanagan's sincerity was independent of the piece of gold, if, perhaps, stimulated

into outbreak by it. Anyhow I felt disposed to accept his complex benediction as an augury of luck.

CHAPTER XXI.

As it happened, the next morning was Saturday, and for once in a way I had only one case to which to attend. It was in the Court of Appeal, and was not likely to be reached.

So, as had been arranged the night before, I met Elizabeth and her father in the great hall of the Courts of Justice, and conducted them by the counsels' corridors and entrances from court to court.

Elizabeth was interested, but not altogether amused. Mr. Rock was profoundly impressed. The building, he remarked, was fine, and had very many points about it considered as a structure, although, in his view, it did not compare to advantage with the Capitol at Washington. Washington, however, was a hole of a location, only fit for Indians and mean whites. You were up to knees there in summer in the dust, to say nothing of cyclones of dust in the air, and you were up to your middle in winter in the slush, which was as bad as an up-river lot on the foreshore, or back away in the swamps.

If he were President of the United States he would

engineer a bill to locate the Capital at Saratoga, and he guessed it would be a popular measure, and would go far towards securing him a second term. But we didn't understand these things in England. Here was our Court fixed at Buckingham Palace, which wasn't a patch, nor a quarter of a patch, on Hampton Court. Greenwich Hospital we turned into a sort of naval West Point. Now Peter the Great, who had his eyes just as open as had old Cardinal Wolsey, had pitched on Greenwich Hospital for his palace, and Peter wasn't far out.

He didn't deny that there were points about Windsor Castle, and also about the Tower. But as for Buckingham Palace, he considered it altogether shoddy and much the same style of architecture as Regent Street. St. James's Palace was a curious old relic.

"Now, if we had any old buildings in our country, sir," he continued, warming up, "we should take a pride in them, and treat them with respect; not let them out for paupers and pensioners off the Government and the Court. Why, if we had in all New York such a place as your Chelsea Hospital, with its glorious old red brick, and its quadrangles, and its gardens running down to the river, our people would come all the way from Florida to see it, and would think themselves well paid for their journey. I wish we could buy one of those places off you, squire, and transport it wholesale and

entire on a big pontoon. We are buying up all your old plate and pictures and books as it is. We don't want to buy your horses. I reckon we can show as good of our own. However, if we can't transplant these treasures of yours, we can always cross the pond to see them for ourselves, and it makes us kinder recollect that we are English after all and straddle round accordingly."

So Mr. Rock, with more of the same sort. He was a perpetual vein of rich native ore, largely mixed with grit, but cropping up from an apparently inexhaustible lode.

It has been wisely said that your first rough impressions of a place are not only the most valuable but generally the most accurate. To lose yourself in detail is a misfortune both for yourself, and—if you have any—for your listeners; or, as the case may be, your readers.

A few days later the Rocks departed for Paris, where it was settled I was to join them as soon as the Courts rose. They went by the shortest route; and I was consequently able to so time my engagements as to bid them farewell on the deck of the steamer at Folkestone, and return to town myself by the next train.

Meantime, Mr. Rock and I had had a very definite conversation, and it had been arranged that the marriage should take place in June. Mr. Rock was disappointed to find that it would be difficult to obtain permission from the

Dean and Chapter to have the thing "fixed up and put through" at Westminster Abbey, and that there were even greater obstacles in the way of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, with which, and with its oak stalls and its organ and its garter banners, he had been much impressed.

"If," he profoundly remarked, "these places belonged to the nation, they ought to be available to the nation for all reasonable purposes, at a tariff sufficient to prevent a block of business, but no more.

Ultimately, we agreed that, if the marriage was to take place in London, it should be at St. George's, Hanover Square; and this matter settled, Mr. Rock and his daughter took their departure.

As to settlements, Mr. Rock took a liberal but an American view of them.

"I shall settle a few dollars on my gell, squire—absolutely. The bulk of my pile she will, of course, have sooner or later. But how I shall tie it up, or whether I shall tie it up at all, are matters that I have not yet settled in my own mind; and I have taken the liberty of settling a few dollars a year on you, with remainder to her and her heirs, because in this ill-regulated world things do not always go on or turn out as you might expect, and so I want to make you, without taking any liberty, a present of a small insurance against accidents or other contingences."

I could only assure Mr. Rock that I appreciated his munificence, and fully sympathised with his motives.

"Wal!" he said; "it's best to let business be business, and pleasure pleasure. Keep 'em apart. You may shake 'em up together, but they won't amalgamate any more'n ile and vinegar. Them's my intentions, squire, and I have telegraphed full instructions to my attorneys in New York to put the matter straight through; and now let's have a small something short and hot, onless you prefer champagne."

As I preferred the "something short and hot," we ratified the contract with it, and, as I remember, we exchanged cigar cases, he having a fancy for mine, which was set with plaques of pink Du Barry porcelain, and I, for his, which was of bark from the Yosemite, bound in oxydised silver.

It is the philosopher of Stagira who somewhere remarks that the exchange of gifts, when it does not amount to a colourable form of bribery, is one of the surest symptoms of friendship, and one of its most pleasant cements.

And now my reader will most naturally ask—what I have not perhaps as yet sufficiently explained—what were really my feelings towards Miss Rock herself, and how far was I acting honestly, or,—to use the more current phrase,—honourably in marrying her.

It is a difficult question to answer. The motives

of all of us are apt to be mixed. There probably never yet was a soldier of the Cross, however pious, from the Crusaders down to Gordon, who did not enjoy fighting for its own sake.

The strict honesty I should say, that I was very much in the state of mind described in Tennyson's *Northern Farmer*, of the new style. I was not "marrying for money," but I was distinctly "marrying where money was." My inclinations and my interests happened to coincide. Had I been in the Church, I should probably have said that Providence, in its inscrutable wisdom, was summoning me, for purposes of its own, to a wider sphere of usefulness. Not being in the Church, I said nothing of the kind, but was nevertheless very well satisfied with the turn which Providence had given to matters, or at any rate allowed them to take.

My cards had somehow all turned trumps in my hand, as if I had been playing whist. I could have laid them on the table and called the game. Fortune always comes with a rush to the aid of those who aid themselves, exactly as when you are on the decline, the fickle jade is ever ready to lend you an accelerating push.

Of course I wrote to my people down in Essex, and received back letters from them, brimming with excitement. My father was delighted beyond measure, at what he was pleased to term my most prudent

choice, and after a page or two of wisdom in the style of Polonius, began as usual to refer dismally to the condition of his banking account.

My sisters were more straightforward. They were both very pleased. They expressed a strong desire to be bridesmaids, and they both, poor things, reminded me that the only really expensive item in a bridesmaid's accoutrements was the locket, which it was the fashion now to decorate with the monograms of the bride on one side and bridegroom on the other, set in various stones, the initials of which spelt out the two names.

They sent also for me to forward on profuse letters of congratulation to my fiancée, which I have no doubt were laboured master-pieces of composition.

So much for home. "So long as thou doest good unto thyself men shall speak well of thee."

CHAPTER XXII.

It is difficult to keep many threads in your hand at once. I ought, however, just to glance at my Parliamentary duties. Practically they gave me no trouble whatever. I had gone into Parliament when I could afford to do so, exactly as I had set up a horse and a groom of my own as soon as I could afford to do so, but I had spoken very seldom, and only on subjects in which I personally took an interest; and on these rare occasions I had addressed Mr. Speaker with most commendable brevity.

Divisions I did not attend, unless they were of real importance to my party, when I made it a point to be present, whatever else might require me elsewhere. In fads, such as bills to regulate the hours for the sale of ginger beer and other non-intoxicant liquids on Sundays and red letter days, or to forbid the crying of muffins and crumpets by bell during the hours of divine worship, I took no manner of interest.

I had consequently proved myself not a fussy member but a useful one. And, above all, I had avoided the blunder of asking for papers bearing on

the designs of [Russia in the Equatorial African Belt, or the exact condition, according to latest devices, of our relations with the Border tribes of Patagonia, and the validity of guarantees given by the chiefs of that country for the safety of Nonconformist and other missionaries.

So I began to be looked upon before very long as a member who prefers to work for the country rather than to make speeches for buncombe. This was what I wanted, but I ought to add that I never forgot to open my mouth on any question of international law; for international law is sound common sense, and it is easy to make it intelligible to a common sense audience as eminently practical as is the House of Commons. And, besides, to be credited with a knowledge of international law gives you something more than a European reputation.

Men whom I could mention, and who are still alive, have made not only reputations but fortunes, and won their way to places of emolument and dignity by a very superficial acquaintance indeed with Grotius, Puffendorff, and Vattel, gleaned at secondhand from Wheaton and Travers Twiss.

The House likes a man with a speciality in him, and to a certain extent I may fairly claim that it found that man in myself.

Thus, then, to sum up I was moving every way, in

Parliament and in my profession; but less in society, for which I obviously had not the time even if I had had the inclination. I know I was looked upon as a man, who, if not quite unsympathetic, was yet, at all events, shy and reserved, which fact the kindly ascribed to pressure of work, and the malicious to arrogance. Both were wide of the mark. The sole causes of my hermit-crab existence were self-containment and a something which was not exactly indolence nor yet indifference, but a neutral tint between the two.

Nor do I believe this frame of mind to be at all unwholesome. It certainly in no way impairs your position, usefulness either to the world at large, or to those that have direct claims upon you; and these are, after all, the best test of a man's mental habits that I can suggest.

About this time a criminal case occurred which excited the wildest interest, not in England only, but over the whole Continent.

A young girl of about two-and-twenty, singularly beautiful, but with a very doubtful character and a notoriously resolute and vindictive temper, was charged with poisoning a very worthless kind of fellow, a French drawing-master, with a remarkably bad *dossier* in Paris, and nothing to recommend him in England except his good looks, his smooth tongue, his *savoir faire*, and a certain facility with his pencil.

The girl's name was Margaret Wilson, and she was the daughter of a Liverpool merchant. Having some talent, or at any rate liking for art, she had attended the art classes at the Ladies' College, with the full knowledge of her parents, and here she had made the acquaintance of Monsieur Achille Daubray, who was one of the masters at the college in question, but of whose antecedents literally nothing seemed to be known.

He had dropped into the town nobody knew how or from where, and had commenced by allowing the fancy shopkeepers to sell pretty little water-colour sketches for him upon a liberal commission. His sketches were dexterous enough in the smartest manner of the Boulevards, but so carefully toned down as to avoid even the possibility of a shock to English prejudices.

He then, as I have said, secured himself a footing in the Ladies' College, and now dropped his trifles, and refused to paint anything but portraits at a rate by no means deterrent, but more than sufficient to enable him, either openly or secretly, to gratify all his tastes, which were those of the very worst, most selfish and most unscrupulous Parisian *maquereau*. *Inter alia*, as it turned out when his *dossier* was sent over by the Parisian police, he was acquainted with Toulon, and had been more than once suspected of crimes which

if proved, would have resigned him to *travaux forcés à perpétuité*.

This man had, according to all popular belief, carried on an intrigue for some months with Margaret Wilson, doing the best he could to ascertain her pecuniary position, and evidently intending to go through the form of marriage with her if her fortune, when he could form an estimate of it, should justify him in the step.

When he found that his prize was not as large as he had imagined, and that he could play his cards with better advantage elsewhere, he most brutally told the girl as much, and insisted that all relations between them should be broken off.

She wrote him a very artful letter, submitting fully to his prudence and better judgment, and, without any idle or irritating reproaches or complaints, but she sent him some keys by which he could gain admission to the house after dusk, and begged him, as a last favour, to visit her for the last time, in the dead of the night, and in her own room.

There he sat, according to his own account, for about an hour, during which she pressed upon him a couple of glasses of wine. The night was chilly, and he hardly needed the pressing, but at last the sky began to lighten, and it was time for him to sneak away. He had hardly reached his own lodgings when

he was seized with the most violent symptoms, and at once sent for medical aid, communicating his suspicions to the doctors. The medical aid was too late. He had taken a dose of tartar emetic, enough to kill not one man, but half-a-dozen, and he died in agonies, which he fully deserved.

The tartar emetic was found in him in quantities practically enormous, and, as he was about the last man to have committed suicide, and, in fact, died in the most abject terror, there was but one conclusion at which *primâ facie* to arrive. So, at all events, the magistrates thought, for they committed Miss Wilson to take her trial at the next Assizes.

I had just mastered the case from the detailed reports in the Liverpool papers, and had, of course, formed my own conclusion on it, when my clerk informed me that a gentleman of the name of Jackson had paid me a special retainer, and a very considerable fee, and wished to see me at once.

I heard incidentally afterwards that the funds for the defence, which was extremely costly, involving the calling of many eminent experts, had been very liberally contributed to by the French Embassy, which happened to know all about Monsieur Daubray, and to be rather glad than otherwise that he was out of the way.

Mr. Jackson was accordingly admitted. He was a portly man, respectably dressed, with an immensely f:

face—apparently devoid of any expression—a solemn but extremely deferential manner and apparel, which, together with a heavy watch chain and a gold signet—he was entirely innocent of other jewellery—denoted extreme solvency.

“This is a most sad case, sir,” he commenced, clearing his throat, and with something like moisture in his eyes. “I never knew so sad a case in the whole of my long professional experience. But I have the assurance of the young lady herself—a most charming, accomplished, and, indeed, lovely girl, that she is entirely innocent, her own belief being that the miscreant committed suicide out of revenge, which seems possible enough to those who, like members of your learned profession, have to necessarily be familiar with every side of human nature. I have left the papers, sir, with your clerk, and with your permission will have a consultation, when you have mastered them; and I have taken the liberty of asking your clerk to suggest two juniors to hold under you, which he has very kindly done, although,”—and here he smiled discreetly—“it was certainly not professional conduct on my part to do as much. Meantime we wish for a writ under Palmer’s Act, in order that the case may be tried in London. I hardly fancy the application will be opposed, as my affidavits are extremely strong. The local press has taken the matter up with the most ex-

treme ignorance and virulence, and local opinion is so excited that meetings have actually been held, and speeches made, to say nothing of sermons in the local pulpits. All this, of course, makes our application little more than formal, but I have given due notice to the Crown, and will arrange with the Treasury solicitor to have the matter brought on at your convenience. I am afraid I shall have to trouble you with several further consultations, but all that I will arrange with your clerk."

And here Mr. Jackson rose to his feet and made me a most profound bow.

"I will give the case all my attention, Mr. Jackson," said I, "and as it is a matter of life and death, will let nothing interfere with my personal attendance at it."

"You are too kind, sir. It's more than my client could have expected, but I will at once inform her, and relieve her mind, and she will, I am sure, be correspondingly grateful, as indeed she ought."

And with this expression of opinion, Mr. Jackson profoundly bowed himself out.

As soon as Mr. Jackson had left, my clerk, Mr. Gutteridge, entered. Barristers' clerks are like Pharaoh's cattle, of two kinds, the lean kind and the fat kind, and Gutteridge certainly belonged to the sleeker variety. His appearance was that of a prosperous stockbroker

or of a wealthy merchant, and it was easy to see that the stagnation and depression of which the majority of his brother clerks were complaining had, at any rate, exercised no baleful influence upon him.

The Bar at present is as severely depressed as are all other professions and occupations, and one sign of this depression is very noticeable. If you saunter leisurely through the Temple, you are almost certain to come across a man past the prime of life, of unmistakably respectable demeanour, and whose apparel has obviously seen its best days. He is doing nothing. It is clear, indeed, that he is on the look out for a job, or is, to borrow the expressive phrase of Mr. Montagu Tigg, "round the corner." You meet him, let us say, in Essex Court. In Pump Court you will come across a second specimen. There is a third waiting in a hopeless kind of way under Goldsmith Buildings. And there are almost sure to be a couple in King's Bench Walk, listlessly interested in the trees and the sparrows, but with the weather-eye wide open for anything that might turn up. These more or less dilapidated individuals are barrister's clerks out of employment, and in quest of a new situation. Their last employer has died, or has retired from practice, or has accepted a Colonial judgeship, and the unhappy clerk has found himself out of employment, and with literally nothing to which he can turn his hand.

The career of a barrister's clerk is extremely precarious. There are great prizes in it, no doubt. The clerk of a great leader will make fifteen hundred a year very easy by legitimate fees, and half as much again indirectly. Then, of course, if his master becomes a judge, he is permanently provided for. But the majority of barristers' clerks have a very hard time of it. They have usually commenced life as office boys at a few shillings a week. The office boy of the Temple is a *gamin sui generis*. His impishness is something absolutely incredible, his precocity miraculous, and his knowledge of the world worthy of a Queen's counsel and circuit leader. For most boys—stable boys, errand boys, shop boys, and other such varieties of the *genus*—the law has its terrors. The office boy in the Temple knows better. Familiarity has bred contempt in him, and he will even go so far as to contest the right of way upon the pavement with a city policeman. Of these promising young gentlemen a certain number are dismissed for petty offences. A few are convicted of theft and embezzlement, and disappear from the society they have enlivened. A still larger number abandon the law in disgust and take to more adventurous callings,—becoming sailors, or railway porters, or potmen, or enlisting, or otherwise adopting a buccaneer life. A select few take kindly to the law, and ultimately develope into barristers' clerks.

The nominal duties of a barrister's clerk are very light. He has to wait upon his master, to aid him in robing and unrobing, to introduce clients to his notice, to receive the fees, and to account for them. His actual duties go very far beyond this. He is expected to act as a sort of factotum to his employer, to go messages for him, to make inconvenient excuses for him, and generally to tell, or, indeed, to invent, any lie that may be necessary upon the spur of the moment. He must also make him acquainted with solicitors, and must ascertain which among that fraternity are respectable and likely to pay their fees, and which are of shady reputation and not to be trusted at all, or at any rate beyond a given limit. Barristers' clerks confer together upon these subjects, and have private black books of their own, far more terrible than any memoranda ever issued from the bureaux of Stubbs or Perry. But this is the mere fringe of the clerk's work. His real duty is to act as "bonnet" to the barrister, whom he serves. I use the term "bonnet" in no invidious sense. A chaperon is to a certain extent a "bonnet" to the young lady whom she escorts. It is a recognised part of her duty to represent the fair *débutante* as accomplished, amiable, affectionate, and generally possessed of all the cardinal virtues. She has, in short, to beat a big drum, and to discourse music upon the pipes. The duties of the barrister's clerk are

analogous. Whatever may be his own private opinion, he has to endeavour to make everybody believe in the immense capabilities, profound learning, and consummate experience of his "governor." He has, in other words, to tout. There are more ways than one of touting, and the best clerk is the one who displays the greatest amount of *finesse* in this difficult art. Much might be written on touting as one of the fine arts, dividing it into its kinds, and distinguishing between the clerk who hangs about bars in Fleet Street, chronicling his master's achievements, and the clerk who takes a promising solicitor to a Sunday dinner at Richmond, captures a big brief with a cheque inside the red tape, and receives the expenses of the day as secret service money. These peculiar functions tend to create a special kind of intimacy between the clerk and his master. Many barristers on retiring from practice deal most handsomely by their clerks, starting them in a business, or otherwise providing for them. Others can no more dispense with their clerk than could Mr. Pickwick have dispensed with Mr. Samuel Weller. He has become a necessary part of their existence, or, to put it mildly, a necessary evil; and so, under one excuse or another, they continue to retain his services. And this affection is often reciprocal. I know of one instance, so recent, that I forbear to give the names, of a clerk who died without wife or family

and left all his savings—several thousand pounds—to his master. Indeed, the clerk is an informal partner with the barrister, and is often treated as such.

The usual method of payment is for the barrister to guarantee his clerk a small sum. The clerk's fees beyond this amount are his own. Everything for him depends, of course, upon the success of his employer. The two are in the same boat.

"I hope, sir," said Mr. Gutteridge, "that you will excuse my congratulating you upon getting this case. Ferret" (Ferret was clerk to Mr. Searcher, the famous criminal advocate) "told me this morning that his governor was instructed. I know Ferret's not too truthful, but I did believe him this time, and you could have knocked me over with a feather when Mr. Jackson called and told me what he had come about. I do indeed congratulate you, sir."

I thanked Mr. Gutteridge very cordially, for I knew that he was perfectly sincere, and that his joy at my good fortune was quite unalloyed with any selfish motive.

"I am afraid it is too great a responsibility, Gutteridge."

"Not a bit of it, sir, not a bit of it! If there's a solicitor in London who knows his business it's Mr. Jackson; and when he picked you out, sir, he knew what he was about. Can you excuse me, sir, for a quarter of an hour?"

"Certainly, Gutteridge." So Mr. Gutteridge went out, and I have little doubt that his object was to fall across the mendacious Ferret, and to pulverise that gentleman with the weighty news of this eventful afternoon.

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Here, at any rate, was a case which, instead of putting judges together by the ears and adding to the already enormous bulk of Law Reports, would probably involve no point of law whatever, which would be for awhile the *cause célèbre* of Europe, and which was in itself extremely curious and interesting.

So I took the papers, and as far as I could read through them for the first time, making brief notes in the margin with blue and red pencil. The depositions came out only too clearly. The magistrates would have grossly neglected their duty if they had dismissed the charge. But I could see my way to a defence sufficiently plausible in the lines so astutely suggested by Mr. Jackson; and it was a defence not at all unlikely to succeed, if made with boldness.

Then I found myself dwelling on technical parts of the evidence, into which space forbids me now to enter, although I recollect them distinctly. And so I sat for several hours until I felt I knew enough of the matter to abandon it for the day.

After dinner at the Windham, I visited the smoking

room, where conversation ran upon nothing but the case. Precluded from joining in the talk that was going on, I was yet a most attentive listener to it, and went away with a very good idea of the lines upon which I should have to deal with the jury.

There is nothing so invaluable in practical life as the opinion of the man in the street; and the opinion of the man in the smoking-room of your club is the next best to that of the man in the street which you can possibly get or even want.

Fortified with much of this collective sagacity, I went home, seeing two things very clearly—that the guilt of Margaret Wilson was believed in without a doubt; that her acquittal was universally desired, and that as for the no doubt inconveniently painful death of Daubray, there was a strong current of opinion to the effect that it only served him right.

So far then my work with the jury would be comparatively easy. My task would be to break down the facts as much as possible; to badger the scientific witnesses for the Crown, and, on my own side, to get out as much as I could of the character of Daubray himself; to put him at his worst before the jury, and to further bewilder the average minds of the twelve good men and true, by calling as many scientific witnesses on my own side as I possibly could.

I communicated these conclusions to Mr. Jackson

the next morning, and he set to work with the greatest zeal, at once securing by telegraph the attendance of the Government expert in medical jurisprudence at Berlin, of two most eminent physicians from Paris, and of all the best talent in London, that was not already arrayed on the other side.

This would of course cost money. "But money, sir," said Mr. Jackson, with a profundity worthy of Lord Burleigh himself, "is no object, absolutely no object whatever." And it certainly seemed as if this astute gentleman was thoroughly justified in his assertions, for I never knew a case in which money was spent more lavishly. When, for instance, the treasury, which is always late, set about finding medical experts to back its opinion, it found to its dismay that all the medical experts were on the other side. I fear, moreover, that one or two witnesses for the Crown, not of essential importance, but still valuable, found it necessary to disregard their recognizances and to pay a flying visit to France. It is scarcely necessary to add that this was a matter in reference to which I did not receive Mr. Jackson's confidences.

Mr. Jackson let me know of the facts from day to day. "We have innocence on our side, no doubt," he observed, with a face that might have been carved out of solid granite. "We have innocence on our side, but I must admit that fortune also seems to favour us.

And I am devoutly thankful to Providence that such should be the case."

And then he shook his head and took snuff.

Our application to have the case tried in London was of course successful. The possibility of prejudice at Liverpool was too obvious for any number of affidavits to swear it away; and our own affidavits, as Jackson had told me, were practically unanswerable. So I had now only to wait till the day came, and then go up to the Old Bailey and do battle.

Nor was it a case that required immense study. It was not a campaign. It would rather be a sharp cavalry skirmish, needing nerve and dash, a steadily-balanced seat, a firm light left hand, and a heavy, swinging right. So that, as Mr. Jackson hinted with the greatest tact, it was far more important that I should come up to the scratch in good physical trim than that I should be worried with details.

"I will leave the details, sir," he said, "to your learned juniors, and I will stick right below you myself in the well of the court, and never leave you for a minute. Take care of yourself, sir, and trust your humble servant." And with a bow combining at once humility, independence, and omniscience, Mr. Jackson backed himself out.

The man had impressed me immensely. It could hardly be that he had missed his chances in life, or

wasted them. He could never have had them. I could not help feeling that in many ways he was most distinctly my superior, and yet our system of society, which is as ridiculous as that of the Hindoos, had made me a Brahmin and him a criminal lawyer—a thing in English eyes little better than a Sudra.

But the man somehow fascinated me. The case interested me; and I saw the wisdom of his advice that I should look to my nerves rather than to my brief, and I acted upon it.

A few days before the trial, I received a very long and sisterly letter from Susan. She was at Nice, but had read all about the case in the English papers; and the Parisian papers, especially the *Figaro* and the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, which latter she was specially taking in, were full of it, and she saw that I had been retained. I had now, she said, the chance not of success, which I had already won, but of something like a brilliant triumph, something to show for once and for all what I was worth, and I must use it most carefully.

"Curiously enough, I know something of Mr. Jackson," the letter went on. "He is immensely capable, entirely to be relied upon, and not in the least likely to mislead you by any over confidence of his own." Then she rattled on about other things.

"I sometimes think," she concluded, "of retiring to a convent, not as a sister, but as a penitent. The idea,

however, is only transitory. I am not conscious of any very great sins, and I am still very fond of life, in which, while I am free, I find the opportunities and have the power of doing good. This would be a miserable world indeed if we could not do a little good in it without organised effort—I in my way, you in yours, and M. le Curé and M. le Préfet each in theirs. That you are doing good I am certain. All honest work is noble, if it be only sweeping out a stable or blacking boots. The surgeon with his diplomas and his case of instruments is not higher in my mind than the dresser with his lint and sponges. But yours is work of the highest caste, and I think you have succeeded in it, because you were born to it. Go on and succeed. I am too old and too fond of you to flatter you.—Yours always,

“SUSAN BRABAZON.”

If anything could have pulled me together for the trial, this letter would have done it. I may just add that after reading it over and over again I had put it into my watch-pocket, and went into Court with it (by a coincidence, for I am by no means superstitious) exactly over my heart.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE day for the trial came, and I felt with misgiving that the forces arrayed against me were distinctly formidable. The Attorney-General, who led for the Crown, was a cold, clear-headed, calculating man, with considerable presence, some pretensions to eloquence, and great readiness. Beyond these he had no virtues, not being a genius, as was Cockburn, or a born aristocrat, and consequently a born gentleman, as was John Burgess Karslake.

I speak of these two great men with a reverence which perhaps may not be apparent. They were the giants of my day, and I doubt if at the Common Law Bar, at any rate, they have ever had their equals. The Attorney-General's junior, or, as he is now commonly termed, "devil," Mr. E. L. Jones, was also a dangerous man, clear-headed, vigorous, and resolute, with inexhaustible power of work. Then there was Mr. Berners, an experienced stuff gown of any age, of exasperating accuracy in detail, and with a mind like a machine.

"When the jury," said Mr. Berners to me, "are tol'

to consider their verdict, my work is over, and I really do not care twopence what that verdict may be. If there is a point of law to be reserved, that is quite another matter. The points of law are always interesting. They have nothing to do whatever with the merits of the case, and they consequently have for an impartial mind a charm of their own. Now I know, my dear fellow, as well as you ought to know, that your interesting client poisoned this scoundrel, and you and I are probably agreed that he richly deserved it. I suppose that line will be your red herring with the jury, although, of course, I am not asking. But I am concerned with the fact of the poisoning, and I want to see the jury convinced of it. I should lunch with the judge and sheriffs, if I were you. It's best to do so. And it prevents the piece being talked about between the acts, which is always undesirable."

And Mr. Berners sorted his papers, and, for all men at the Bar develop funny little habits of their own, hoisted up the slack of his breeches as if he were a sailor.

The judge, Sir John Manley, had an evil reputation as a hanging judge. It was thoroughly undeserved. He merely did his duty with an entire absence of mawkish sentiment. He was a strange mixture of contrarities. He lived practically as alone as Mr. Tulkinghorn of Bleak House, in an immense mansion in

Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. He was supposed to be superior to every human infirmity, and in many respects he resembled Ignatius Loyola, just as intense frost resembles intense heat. His mind was as precise as a chronometer, and almost as insensible to external influences. In private life he was, if not austere, at all events, simple, almost to the point of ostentation. His only two weaknesses were horse-racing and fox terriers. Of the latter he had a strain of his own, and was seldom seen abroad in mufti without two or three of them at his heels. He also never missed a horse-race, and was understood to be confidential adviser to the Jockey Club, of which ornament to our civilisation he had been for many years an honorary member.

He was a most unpleasant judge with whom to have to deal in such a case, but his clear-headedness was at any rate a gain. I believe that for the wretched prisoner he felt as little sympathy one way or the other as do the *cocottes* of Monaco for the miserable crippled pigeons that tumble into the sea beyond the limits of the shooting-ground. And yet there were strange streaks of humanity in him, of which perhaps the most remarkable was a detestation, amounting almost to hatred, of anything like cruelty, meanness, or oppression. This humanitarianism, if I may so term it, he carried into the minutest details of life, and he would devote a whole morning of his life to attending a police c

that he might give evidence against a costermonger for torturing a donkey.

Thus everything would depend partly upon the humour he was in, and partly upon the particular view he might take of the case.

Tartar emetic is a cruel poison. It tortures as well as kills, and this fact, was, of course, against us. On the other hand, mental torture, which the prisoner had undoubtedly suffered in its wickedest form, was a something that would make his blood boil and predispose him to almost take upon himself some of the functions of her advocate. I doubt upon the whole if we could have had a better judge.

I may add, that I was personally acquainted with Sir John Manley, who, when at the Bar, had been an intimate friend of my grandfather's, and I had received much kindness from him.

The prisoner appeared in the dock in the plainest possible dress, and with a heavy veil, which she lifted to plead, and then let fall again. She was allowed a seat, and she never once changed or moved her attitude. The jury, for all that they could tell, might have been trying a veiled statue.

The Attorney-General's opening was logical, dispassionate, and extremely dangerous. He began by telling the jury that they must dismiss from their minds, as he did from his, all sentiments except that

of simple justice. He was there unsworn to do his duty. They were there sworn upon their oaths to give a true verdict according to the evidence, and the evidence alone. And he then proceeded to weave his rope.

Daubray was a man beneath human contempt, but not the less under the protection of the law. With his character they were not concerned. They had to try the simple issue of how he came by his death. He believed he should satisfy them beyond all possibility of doubt that the prisoner had the strongest reasons in the world for wishing to remove him out of her path. He should show them that she purchased clandestinely a poison well known as producing effects strikingly similar to those of ordinary disease, and one perpetually recurring in the dreary annals of criminal trials. He would prove that after she had possessed herself of this poison Daubray visited her at her own instigation. He returned home, and was almost immediately seized with the most violent and agonizing symptoms. He at once expressed his conviction that he had been poisoned, and that conviction was amply justified by his almost immediate death and by the discovery of the poison in his body, in quantities that could leave no doubt it had been feloniously administered. What possible explanation of these facts, which could be proved down to their minutest detail,

would be offered by his learned friends for the defence, it was not his part to anticipate. It would be for the jury to consider these facts in all their bearings, and to give their evidence in accordance with them. And these facts he would now establish to such demonstration as is possible in all human matters short of scientific problems. All he begged was for the jury to discharge their duty as impartially and with as little feeling as it was his hope, and he might say his prayer, that he should discharge his own.

I must confess that I had never before heard a more telling, powerful, and utterly unimpassioned address.

Then came the evidence with which my reader is already acquainted, and which I will not again inflict upon him in detail. The judge exasperated me, and at the same time I think did me good with the jury, by putting questions of his own intended to bring out little points which it seemed to him the prosecution had missed. But the evidence continued its course irresistibly, and I could not help wondering whether the jury, being simple men on their oaths, would be capable of resisting it.

The one point to which I directed myself was the amount of tartar emetic taken, and in this I confess my object was rather to mystify the jury than to set up any theory of my own. The twelve good men and

true got fairly bewildered by the amount of the drug that had been used. It had been enough to kill half-a-dozen men. How could one man have taken it without being aware of the fact, and how could he have got home without being overtaken by its effects upon the road? Might it not have been possible that he had taken the poison himself out of bravado, and knowing that in an overdose it was its own antidote, by the intense vomiting it produces? I could see that they were ready, as Daubray's character came out, more and more to catch at any suggestion which would enable them to give the wretched girl the benefit of a doubt.

I must here say that I am condensing a trial which began on a Monday and ended late on a Friday night, and that I do not wish to spin it out into many chapters, much less into a volume.

By the time the evidence for the Crown was concluded, I had brought out more than enough in cross-examination to make the jury look upon Daubray as a noxious vermin whose death on any except legal grounds was a consummation to be devoutly sympathised with. If there is one offence more heinous in the eyes of an average Englishman than another, it is the crime of *chantage*, and of this they had clearly made up their minds that Daubray had been guilty. They must have jumped at this conclusion, as there was no direct evidence of it, but they had evidently got it fixed in

their heads, and I could see that it was working with them strongly in the prisoner's favour.

We have all kinds of more or less absurd rules as to what may or may not be brought out in evidence upon a criminal trial. In theory, these rules are more or less admirable. In law treatises they are stated with the utmost perspicuity. But, as a matter of fact, in any trial of importance everything that the jury ought to know to aid them in their judgment, somehow comes out as clearly as if we had no rules of evidence whatever. The jury, in a dogged way, are determined to get at the whole truth, including anything collateral that may aid them, and it has been my experience that they invariably succeed.

On the fourth day of the trial, a Thursday, I had to open my case for the defence, and I cannot even now refrain from briefly indicating the line I took.

Beginning with the customary common-places, I told the jury I should invite them to believe that this miserable adventurer, seducer, and blackmailer had, as a last attempt, made a pretence of poisoning himself, and had carried his wicked attempt at intimidation and extortion too far. Upon this view I dwelt in all its probabilities, until I could see that the twelve good men and true had thoroughly got hold of it, and were prepared to clutch at it if they could possibly see their way to do

so. And I then ventured upon what, looking back even at this time, I cannot but consider a *coup*.

Daubray, I invited the jury to believe, had persuaded his victim to buy the poison herself, at different places, and in her own name; telling her that he wanted it, and adding that as an alien, and not favourably known in the town, he would have difficulties himself in its purchase. He had then, meeting her by his own appointment, and having received the drug from her, threatened, with that love of theatrical effect which is so innate in Frenchmen of the worst type, to take the whole dose upon the spot, unless she consented to all his demands. I reminded them that the threat of suicide is the *dernier ressort* of a French adventurer, and is one to which they almost invariably have recourse. Supposing he had carried out this vile design, was it not possible that he might have drunk the dose in her presence, perhaps miscalculating its full strength, perhaps intending that the very amount of the poison might prove its own antidote? I then sketched the state of mind of his victim, more horror-struck than ever, with not only shame upon her head, but with the scaffold clearly in her path, powerless, bewildered, and incapable of action—paralysed in mind, and probably even in limb, by the horror of the situation and its terrible dangers.

Daubray, I suggested, finding that to reason with

her was hopeless, and fearing that to stay with her would be dangerous, had hurried home. The agonies of death had come upon him even in that brief journey. He had hurriedly sent for medical aid, and had died with a lie upon his perjured lips, endeavouring to take away the life itself of the girl whom he had blackmailed, ruined, and betrayed. The whole facts of the case, and the whole antecedents of the man, harmonised with this theory. It left no fact unexplained, or unaccounted for. It contradicted no single fact that had been deposed to in evidence. It was complete in itself, and if they found it so, it was their duty to give credence to it, and to acquit the young girl in the dock of the terrible crime of which she stood charged. Her young life and her fair fame were in their hands, and were infinitely more valuable than the life of the miscreant who, as I begged them to believe, had terminated his wretched career with malice and murder in his heart, and with a lie trembling on his lips as he had passed to a tribunal higher and more infallible than any on earth.

The most tragic of criminals have a cruelly matter-of-fact side. I sat down, so the papers said, amidst applause, which was immediately suppressed by the officers of the court. But I could see that I had not mistaken my effect upon the jury. Then I turned my glance to the left, where the prisoner was seated, veiled

and motionless, in the dock. Then I looked up at the bench, and in spite of the strain of mind that was upon me, could not refrain from a start.

Seated by one of the Sheriffs, with the customary large bouquet of flowers which is a relic of the old days when the court was strewed with herbs as an antidote to the gaol fever, was a lady with her veil down, but whom I none the less recognised at once. It was Suzan Brabazon.

I hurried out of court, which was adjourned at the end of my speech, and I hunted up and down through the corridors and lobbies, and made every inquiry, but without result. All I could gather was that the lady had come in with a sheriff's order—which it is not at all a difficult thing to procure—that her brougham had been waiting in the yard all the morning, and that she had driven away the moment the court had risen.

There was nothing to be done for it but to go through the solemn mid-day luncheon with the judge, sheriffs, and aldermen in the aldermen's private room.



CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN this repast was concluded, the court re-assembled, and I began to call my few scientific witnesses—few but admirably selected by Mr. Jackson. That gentleman sat below me with solemn, stolid confidence on his vast expanse of features, and my witnesses certainly did their work uncommonly well.

They all declared that the facts were perfectly consistent with my theory; that tartar emetic is a poison most uncertain and capricious in its action; that most minute doses of it have proved fatal, and that large doses of it have been taken with impunity, and of both these propositions, they cited any number of instances in proof. It was a poison which when used by murderers had always been given in very minute doses, and at intervals, being what is known to toxicologists as a slow poison. In this way it often escapes detection, eliminating itself from the system while its murderous effects are still going on. And there is little doubt that it was antimony in the form of tartar emetic which was the Aqua Tofana of the Middle Ages.

They were very profound in their manner and demeanour, were these gentlemen. Some of them gave their evidence through an interpreter, but the majority spoke very slowly but most intelligibly in strongly-accentuated English. They puzzled the jury, but they did no more.

I briefly summed up their evidence, and the Attorney-General, either from courtesy, or because he had exhausted all that he could urge, did little more than remind the jury of their terrible responsibility, disclaim any attempt on his own part to give colour to the case, and generally remind them of the gravity of the issue and the sacred nature of the oath.

And now came the turn of Mr. Justice Manley. His lordship was almost ostentatiously impartial, and yet it was only too clear that his own mind was made up. I could find no fault with what he said; I could take no exception to it, but I inwardly feared that it was telling against the motionless statue in the dock, and I knew his lordship well enough to know that it was intended to do so.

The jury listened with profound attention, and retired without asking any irrelevant or foolish questions.

It was seven o'clock when they left. Mr. Justice Manley retired to his private room, and the jury to consider their verdict. The crowd in court produced flasks, oranges, and other comestibles, and began to discus

the case in all its bearings, and the probability of the verdict, as is their invariable habit.

"Let us come out into the corridor, sir," said Mr. Jackson. "These lunatics have come for a hanging match. But I think you have won on the post."

For an hour I paced with Mr. Jackson up and down the cool matted corridors. Mr. Jackson was confident that we should win. I was more than doubtful.

"I know the average British dunderhead better perhaps than you do," said he. "Our doctors have fogged them a little. The fellow was a thorough-paced blackguard, which is a thing they naturally dislike, and he was a foreigner, which, in these days of foreign competition, is a thing your British tradesman hates, as he hates co-operative stores, or anything that touches his pocket. The behaviour of our client was perfect: it could not have been better, and told vastly in her favour. If the jury can let her off, they will, but it will be a bad sign if they're over an hour. They are bound to wait a considerable time for decency's sake."

For an hour almost to the minute we had to pace up and down. Then it was announced that the jury had arrived at their verdict, and were coming back, so we too quickly returned to court.

The prisoner stood at the bar of the dock, immovable, and with her eyes looking out before her into

space. Even now I can recollect the extreme beauty of her face. Her hair was brushed plainly back, as you can see the hair in the Greek statues of Artemis. Against her closely-fitting black dress and small black bonnet, her clearly-cut features showed out with a terrible paleness. Mr. Justice Manley was evidently as anxious as anyone else, and to those who know that learned ornament to the bench, I need hardly say more.

"Gentlemen of the jury," asked the clerk of arraigns, after the names had been called over, "are you all agreed upon your verdict?"

"We are," answered the foreman resolutely.

"Do you say that the prisoner at the bar is guilty of the wilful murder of Achille Daubray, or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," replied the foreman firmly.

Then several things happened at once. The clerk of arraigns uttered the formula, "You say that she is not guilty, and that is the verdict of you all;" Mr. Justice Manley held up his hand imperatively; and the ushers shouted silence, which was preserved in court, although the roar of the crowd outside rendered his lordship's metallic notes barely audible.

"You have had a long and responsible duty," he said; "and I will give orders that you are exempted from further service at *this* court for a very considerable period."

The jury bowed their acknowledgments and scrambled

out of the box. The judge hurried away through his private door. I turned my eyes to the dock, but the acquitted woman had disappeared. I looked into the well. Mr. Jackson had vanished also. Then, to avoid the crowd, I clambered up on the judge's bench, and retired to the robing-room. There was Mr. Jackson at the door. I shook hands with him cordially.

"Our client wishes me to thank you, sir," he said. "I wish to congratulate you on the most brilliant and powerful speech I have ever heard. I will do myself the honour of seeing your clerk to-morrow morning." And Mr. Jackson bowed his departure.

I unrobed hurriedly, and was driven off not to the Windham, where I should have been pestered with questions, but to a restaurant, where nobody could come and interrupt me or bother me with his own criticisms and opinions. Then I solemnly and in silence enjoyed an excellent dinner and a bottle of burgundy. An immense weight was off my mind, and I was proportionately relieved. And then—so wayward are the caprices of reaction—I went round to a friend's club, where I was little known, and played a game or two at pool, with varying luck. For, now that the thing was over, my hand was not as steady as it might have been.

The pool finished, I lit a cigar, bade my friend good-night, sauntered back to Chapel Street, and went

to bed most prosaically. My only interruption was on the doorstep, where my landlord was waiting to catch me.

"All London's talking of it, sir," said that gentleman. "They're crazy about it. I humbly offer you my congratulations. What time in the morning would you like to be called?"

My landlord was, as a rule, a most undemonstrative man and his kindly thoughtfulness so affected me that I could scarcely answer him, but I managed to name my usual hour, and went upstairs. And so ended what had certainly been, one way or another, the most eventful day in a not altogether uneventful life.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN I woke in the morning, which was at about a quarter to nine—for I had slept rather later than usual—I still felt a little played-out, more with triumph, I believe, and the reaction of it, than with exertion.

I rang the bell, and my landlord made his appearance with a number of letters, and the announcement that my clerk was waiting. My clerk brought good news. There were only two matters that day which had required my personal attention, and he had already adjourned one of them by consent, and handed over the other to a brother barrister, with whom I frequently exchanged work. Thus, then, my day was clear, and I resolved that I would make an absolute holiday of it.

With this virtuous resolve upon me, I ensconced myself comfortably in the pillows, and began to open my letters. First I took those which were obviously circulars or on business, looked at them and tossed them aside. This left a remainder of only three. One was from Mr. Justice Manley, marked "Strictly Private," congratulating me on my success, but concluding with emphatic words, "All the same, young gentleman,

you cheated justice." Another, long and passionate, but very sensible, was from my client herself. It was the sort of letter a young woman might be expected to write under such circumstances, and concluded by begging that I would not trouble myself to answer it. The third was, as I had seen from the address, from Susan Brabazon, and I turned myself round in bed to read it leisurely, for she must have sat up till late to write it, as there were many pages of it.

It began by telling me what I had not known—that she had been unable to resist coming over from Nice on purpose to hear the case, and through the city influence of her bankers, had managed to secure a seat on the bench throughout its whole course, although, perhaps, I had not noticed her. Then she expressed her opinion on the case itself, which was very shrewd and clever, but which I need not give in detail. Evidently she was of opinion that strictly legal justice had been baffled. Then followed some pleasant reminiscences of our old days in Bayswater and elsewhere, and then came the postscript, in which is always to be found the object of a woman's letter.

"I am in town for a few days, and as I have paid you the compliment of giving several of these to yourself, I wish you would manage to give one of those that are left to me. Let us spend a day after the old fashion. You shall drive me out somewhere into '

country, and we will dine at a roadside inn off roast fowl and potatoes and apple tart, and other such rural fare. I am hungry for an inn with a signboard flapping over the doorway, and a touch of rustic simplicity about it."

The letter was dated from Claridge's, a very few minutes' walk from my lodgings, and I at once sent round a messenger with a note to say that I would come as soon as I was dressed, and would drive her out when she pleased.

"We will have," said I, as I picked out a comfortable tweed suit, with appropriately countrified additions, "a rustic day of it;" and having finished my toilette, I at once hurried round to some stables in Piccadilly where I was well known, and selected as neat a tandem and as comfortable a dog-cart as could be put together. With this equipage, and my groom with Napoleonically-folded arms on the back seat, looking as if the whole turn-out, including myself, belonged to him, and he had yesterday snatched the verdict in person, I trotted round and drew up at the door of Claridge's in the very best Essex style—and most Essex men know how to drive.

Mrs. Brabazon did not keep me waiting in the coffee-room three minutes. She hurried down, charmingly dressed in dark-grey silk, a long otter-skin jacket, gauntlet gloves, and a compact little black bonnet of

the style which will hand down to immortality the name of Maria Hamm.

At her entry, the waiter conveniently and discreetly withdrew. There happened to be no one else in the room, and she seized me by both hands and gave me a most hearty kiss.

"You did it splendidly, Jack," she said; "splendidly! She was guilty, of course, though I mustn't ask you, but I declare you almost made me believe her innocent. At all events, you proved that there wasn't evidence on which to hang a—well, let us say a tom cat, and you look as fresh after it all as if nothing had happened. It's wonderful! I suppose it's practice."

These were genuine compliments, and I liked them. They made me feel as I told her, several inches taller, and proportionately important. Then we went through our paraphernalia, as all travellers should, and we sallied into the street. My groom was standing at the leader's head, an assistant ostler from the hotel yard was by the wheel.

Mrs. Brabazon was in her seat in a moment. I followed her, gathered up the reins, gave my whip a fresh double thong worthy of the Yorkshire road, and away we went, my groom clambering up behind, and then assuming an air which seemed to say "find a better turn-out than this, if you can."

We rattled pleasantly through the streets, until

came into the open country, and we shaped our course for a pleasant little village which I know in Hertfordshire, not many miles beyond Hendon, with its so-called lake. The place I selected was not altogether inappropriate, as it was many years ago the scene of a murder which set not London only, but England, and not England only, but Europe, talking and wondering. I mean the murder of Weare, the gambler, by his companions, Hunt, Thurtell, and Probert. The place is called Ellstree, and near it is a little wood, exquisite in the summer time, but bearing the un-idyllic name of Boreham.

Although only the beginning of February, the sun was shining brightly, the roads were dry and hard, and the horses' feet rattled on them. In the leafless trees and along the leafless hedges the birds were noisy, and now and again we could hear the querulous cackle of a blackbird scuttling along the hedge, disturbed by our clatter, or in the fallows, the cheep of the partridge and the shrill note of the corncrake.

We passed neither magpie, crow, nor any other bird of evil omen, and I never even now can remember in my life a brighter, happier drive. Everything was perfect in its way—the weather, the scenery, and, although I say it, the Napoleonic groom, and the horses, who had evidently worked together before and were thoroughly accustomed to each other.

We pulled up at the door of the Red Lion, and the landlord hurried out, as befitted the importance of a visit from persons of superior quality. He could give us, he explained, a dinner which he thought we should really like. We must not think that the resources of his house were limited. He could produce spring soup, eels, a mutton cutlet, which we should find it hard to beat, a couple of his own spring chickens, with mushrooms and pastry. And he had some wine which he could recommend. He knew what was proper, for he had been a gentleman's servant himself, and his house was much frequented in the summer. Might I leave things to him, and at what hour would we like dinner?

I named the time when twilight would be closing, and then Susan and I started for a stroll along the Hertfordshire roads, which were dry and hard under foot, and as yet innocent of dust.

For a while we talked about everything—about the great case, and the judge (with whom Susan had fallen in love), and the counsel engaged in it; about the latest burlesque, and the latest novel; about Nice, where Susan had been stopping, and Monte Carlo, where she had been playing carefully and losing steadily. Then we talked about the old boarding-house days at Bayswater, and she broke out into a laugh so loud and merry that

it almost made the few echoes in the neighbourhood ring.

"I have something to tell you about that," she said.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I will tell you after dinner. It is too good to be told now."

Then, as the time was drawing in, we sauntered back to the inn. The rustics in that neighbourhood are doltish, and we were unknown; and I have some sort of a dim recollection that we walked hand in hand like children going to church. I know that we made a short cut through some fields, which involved one stile and two swing gates, and that I sternly exacted toll at each. There was something Theocritean about the whole day and its surroundings, and so at last we found ourselves at the inn.

How we loitered over our dinner; how thoroughly we enjoyed it; how we chattered; how we had the landlord in, and complimented him, and made him drink an immense tumbler of his wine and light one of my cigars, and give us his views on the ministry and the agricultural crisis; how we had the tandem brought round; how, when we were seated, the landlord's wife made her appearance with a bunch of early violets and

small glasses of hot milk punch, brewed from a special recipe of her grandmother's, and warranted to keep out the evening damp; how we rattled off, and how merrily we bowled along the road, downhill for almost its entire extent, till we drew up at the portals of Claridge's, are things I cannot tell in detail; but it was a happy day, and will remain written as such for ever on the "remembering tablets of my mind."

"Come in for a minute," said Susan, and in I went.

"To-morrow is Sunday," she continued. "You cannot be wanted in court to-morrow; come and dine with me. Come early, and take me for a walk in the Park first. I want to keep you out of the company of flatterers and time-servers, or else this success of yours will be turning your young head."

"Well," I laughed, "I will be here at three, and we will go for a walk if it's fine, or I will sit indoors with you if it is wet. By the way, you have not told me about your joke in reference to the Bayswater establishment."

She burst out laughing again.

"*A demain.* It is a full-flavoured tale. I will tell it you in the Park if it is fine, and here if it is wet. Now, go away with you, and be punctual to morrow."

"And I too," I added, "have something to tell you about myself—something really most important."

"What is it, Jack?" she asked, with an immediate change in her voice.

"I will keep it till to-morrow, after you have told me your own story. If it does not astonish you, why, as the elder Mr. Weller observed, 'I am one Dutchman and you are another,' and that's just all about it."

"I am no Dutchman, Mr. Severn," she retorted, drawing herself up to her full height, with a mock air of injured dignity that was very comical.

"I never said you were," I answered. "On the contrary, I know better."

"You ought to have your face slapped for your impertinence. Be punctual to-morrow by way of penance."

And so I strolled round to Chapel Street, and found, amongst other things, a telegram from Paris. It was from Mr. Cyrus Napoleon Washington Q. Rock, who was so fond of his names that they appeared in the missive in full. The body of the communication was as follows:—

"Magnificently done, my son. Everybody here wild about it. If you were a born citizen we should run you for President. Elizabeth agrees. We are both hippy. Write to us, and expect letter. Paris good

enough, but not a patch on Saratoga. Everybody rather English here, except us Yanks. Kindest regards and congratulations from both of us."

"He is an old trump," I said, as I clambered into my bed, and what was more, I meant it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THE next day being Sunday," as Robinson Crusoe would have it in his diary, I made my appearance at Claridge's at the appointed hour. It happened to be a very beautiful day indeed, and Susan and I proceeded at once to those glorious gardens of the Botanical Society in the Regent's Park, where we wandered about on the thick velvety grass, which by this time had lost its morning dampness, for the sun was shining brightly. And we strayed through the tropical house, where the immense bananas and palms tower up over your head, and we visited the water-lily house and inspected the gigantic leaves of the Victoria lily.

The great charm of the Regent's Park, and of the Botanical Gardens in particular, has always been to my mind the enormous number of birds to be found there unsuspected in the centre of London's wilderness of houses. I believe there is hardly a British bird wanting, except perhaps such rare things as the golden eagle or the night heron, or local varieties, such as the Cornish chough and the Royston crow.

As we walked up and down, the little nut-hatch,

with its bright eye and lissom neck, darted about the bark; great thrushes hopped about almost under our very feet; the wood-pigeons answered one another in the elms; and upon the ornamental water, utterly regardless of the native and acclimatised swans, geese, and ducks, a pair of saucy dab-chicks were bobbing up and down, and scuttering to and fro like schoolboys just turned out of school.

It was like a glorious patch from the heart of a forest transplanted by magic to the centre of London, and dressed with the gardener's most consummate skill. If you want to see the place at its worst, go when marquees have been erected and bunting is flying, and the so-called *beau monde* of London is *en fête*, and three or four bands of the household troops are making evening hideous with vales and operatic selections. To-day we had the place practically to ourselves.

"Jack," she said, "business before pleasure, as the schoolmaster said who always did his flogging in the quarter of an hour before dinner. Let me hear what you have to say."

I felt a little awkward, but the thing had to be done, so I told her as briefly and yet as fully as I could about my engagement to Miss Rock.

"Do you care for her, Jack?"

"Yes, I honestly think I do, as much as I am ever likely or should have been ever likely to care for an

woman in the world except yourself. She is good-looking, naturally clever, without being brilliant, has an admirable temper, so far as I can judge, is fond of animals and treats them kindly, which is always a good sign in a woman, and, as I need not tell you, has any amount of money. Rock, her father, is shrewd but genuine, and his good qualities are very sterling."

"I believe you are right," she answered. "I happen to know some people who have met them both in the States and here, and who have all given me pretty much the same account. For Mr. Rock having made his pile, and having realised it and stuck to it, is more or less a marked man wherever he goes."

"He is not at all ostentatious about his pile," I answered, rather deprecatingly. "He is as simple as a schoolboy."

"All Americans of the true grit are. It is your shoddy man, only fit for 'down-city,' who gives himself airs and puts on side. Whatever the Rocks may be, they are not shoddy." This opinion I most cordially endorsed. "And Miss Rock, too," she continued, "is good-looking I know, for I have seen her photographs in any number. They were conspicuous at Walery's and Disderi's; and I hear she is accomplished."

"Rather say naturally clever," I replied.

"She is that too, but she is accomplished as well. Americans are immensely particular over the education

of their children, far more than we in England are. Well, Jack, you have done wisely in every way, and I congratulate you with all my heart. Yours were capital pigs, no doubt, if one may be vulgar in this lovely place, but you have managed to bring them to a very excellent market."

I don't ask my reader to believe it, but I am satisfied in my own mind that Susan Brabazon was perfectly sincere in her congratulations.

"And what was it you had to tell me about Bayswater?" I asked, feeling it time to turn the conversation.

"Ah, I must tell you! and it's a story only to be told in the open. I shall laugh over it till the day of my death. Well, I went round to the old boarding-house to ask after a stray volume or two: I had left them by accident. I had Bruno with me, an immense St. Bernard that I have lately bought, the size of a calf, but as gentle as a kitten. I purchased him in the Lower Alps; and I had with me a rather formidable dog-whip, which I carry for show rather than use, and it has a swivel in the butt which makes it handy as a leash."

"I know the kind of instrument," I replied; "it is made of any number of strings, and knotted like a Russian knout."

"You are quite right," she answered, half choking with suppressed laughter. "Well, I went round, and old Bruno lay down on the steps outside, and in I went, and while I was waiting in the frowsy old dining-room who should come in but the M'Lachlan in all her war-paint."

"And what did you say to her?"

"Why, I took with me her precious epistle to Miss Vivian, so I pulled it out and asked her as gravely as a judge whether that was her name and her handwriting. She turned as red as a peony and then as white as a sheet. Then she pulled herself together and said: 'Yes, madam, it is; and in doing my duty, I hope I have been a humble instrument in the hands of Providence for doing good.' Well, Jack, her impudence put me in such a rage that I felt the strength of a giant on me. I hauled her over my knees like a naughty child, held her firm in spite of all her wriggings and squirmings, and gave her a good half-dozen with Bruno's whip. Her language, when she had shaken down her skirts, was such as I cannot repeat. 'Swear away, madam,' said I, as coolly as need be; 'it will take more than all your swearing to rub out those marks; and recollect that if you go to a police magistrate or redress, you will have to show them to him in open court, which I should think your old-established maiden modesty would revolt from. If you write any more

letters about me, and I hear of it, I will come round and repeat the dose!"

I laughed till the tears rolled down my cheeks.

"And what did she do?"

"Well, you see, Jack, my child, she couldn't exactly sit down—I doubt if she'll achieve that operation for some few days to come, for I must almost have flayed her. But she waddled out of the room with as much clannish dignity as was possible under the circumstances, stumbling over the maid-of-all-work, whose eye, I suppose, had been glued to the key-hole the whole time. The two sprawled together on the mat. Besides, just as I was going out of the door, that good-natured bookmaker came in and asked me how I was and what I was laughing at, and admired my 'dawg.' So I told him I was well, thanked him for his compliment to Bruno, and advised him to ask Sarah, or else Miss M'Lachlan herself, what had happened, for I could not exactly tell him myself. He went in with a broad grin on his features, and of course the story will be all over the neighbourhood. I fancy the M'Lachlan will have to seek fresh fields and pastures new, as soon as she is able to dispense with the diachylon and to get about again."

The broad humour of the scene was so irresistibly comic that we both burst out into peals of laughter, which fairly scared the water fowl.

"Well Jack, that was business, and as we've no more business to talk over, I vote for pleasure. I can't ask to be one of your wife's bridesmaids, I'm afraid, but there's no reason why we shouldn't have a good evening of it to-night. I leave for Rome to-morrow. Let us kill time before dinner, for the grass is getting damp."

So we killed time for the rest of that day very innocently. First we drove straight to the Langham, where we had the orthodox tea. Then we made our way to Claridge's, where I sat with her until dinner time. We were waited upon at dinner by a gentleman, with assistants under him, of course, who must have somehow missed his mark in life. Nature clearly intended him, from his solemn features, down to his portly chest and statuesque calves, for a shovel hat. And his demeanour was archiepiscopally grave and impressive.

Dinner over, this functionary—for waiter I cannot bring myself to call him in cold blood—reverentially, and almost sacrificially, placed the claret jug on a small table before the fire, arranged the dessert, and retired.

It is Dickens who says that a waiter never either runs or walks, but that he possesses a mysterious power of skimming in and out of the room which is altogether unknown to other mortals. This power our waiter possessed in an almost supernatural degree.

Then Susan betook herself to the piano, and half

played, half improvised to me while I smoked. She had an exquisite touch, and a natural genius for music. And then we sat talking on, not about anything in particular, until the clocks struck twelve, when we parted, after the fashion of sworn brothers and sisters, but as natural brothers and sisters very seldom do part in this world, so far as my experience goes.

"It has been such a happy day," said Susan, "that I shall go to sleep at once instead of ruining my eyes by reading in bed."

"And I," I replied, "will be a good boy, and follow your example."

I was as good as my word; but I rose next morning early, and after my canter in the Row, stopped at Solomon's, and then left my card at Claridge's with a pretty bouquet of exotics, orchids, and early blossoms from the Riviera, with a short note to say that I had kept my word and slept soundly, not even dreaming of the M'Lachlan.

CHAPTER XXVII.

I SAW Susan off by the evening mail from Victoria, and being now entirely alone in London, reverted to my regular work. The latter, familiar as I now was with all routine and with any point of law likely to arise, was yet hard enough, by reason of its very bulk. Besides, I had to attend in Parliament for the divisions, and occasionally to speak upon any legal matter that might crop up. Thus I came to make the House my club, and a very pleasant club it is—the most comfortable and luxurious certainly, if not the most select, in London.

The Rocks had gone to the Riviera, where they were to stay till Easter, that we might then meet in Paris. Elizabeth wrote to me, I think more or less every day. I, with a touch of business in my habits, wrote every day at greater or less length—usually less—and took care to keep her posted up in my doings.

But my life was matter of sufficiently eventful routine until Easter set me free, and then I hurried off to Paris to meet my *fiancée* and her father, taking up

my quarters at Hôtel Meurice. The Rocks had not as yet arrived, but were expected at the Grand.

I idled away my time until they came. To idle in Paris is a science yielding extremely pleasant, if not exactly profitable, results. My tastes were simple and sedate. I made a few purchases, mostly cheap ones, out of curiosity and idleness more than because I wanted the things. I went one evening to the Hippodrome; saw Bidel banging his lions about, and actually persuaded him to do me the honour of having supper with me.

He was much, poor fellow, after the best type of our English prize-fighters; very modest and reticent about his prowess, but evidently proud of it, and as simple as a schoolboy. He left a singular, but very lasting, impression on me.

Then, too, I a bit astonished the Parisians by driving about tandem in my best Essex style. The French are now admirable four-in-hand whips—as good, indeed, as ourselves; but for tandem, with a lightly-running dogcart, they seem somehow not to have the nerve.

I had not been thus killing time for three days before the Rocks arrived, having duly notified me of their coming by any number of telegrams. And then we had what Mr. Rock called “a time of it,” and “went through over Paris fair and straight and square.”

As everybody must know what this means, I need hardly dwell upon the details. There is always a youthful element in Americans, especially among those who have made their fortune early in life, which asserted itself very strongly in Mr. Rock, cropping up to the surface like rich metal through quartz, and bursting out in an irrepressible jet at a moment's notice, like the petroleum with which he filled his tubs.

He was decorous, of course, as became the father of a marriageable, and, in fact, an engaged daughter, but he was brimming over with wild fun and animal spirits, which with his native shrewdness made him intensely amusing.

We had, as he himself emphatically said, all the fun of the fair—the World's Fair, Paris, which so strangely resembles in many respects the Vanity Fair of John Bunyan.

But the days although busy were very pleasant; and what I may honestly and straightforwardly call my attachment for Elizabeth Rock grew in strength continually. She was then a charming girl, as she is now a charming woman, and it was a pleasure to be with her, which is more than you can say of many of her sex, as those who are the best able to judge are usually the first to admit.

Mr. Rock's experiences of Monte Carlo were peculiarly amusing and edifying, and I can hardly help

giving them, with some condensation, in more or less his own words.

"Wal, squire," said he, "I've played poker and euchre, likewise monte. I've played them in Bowery, and on Mississippi steamers. Likewise I've shot the tiger at 'Frisco, where every man went to the saloon with his shooting-irons handy. At your Monte Carlo it's all straight and respectable. No shooting-irons there; but, phew! they play high, they do, in spite of the limit. There was an Austrian prince there who planked down his dollars like a prince. The run favoured him, squire. He realised considerably, and he went away with joy and peace in his countenance. Then besides the regular lot you always see round any green cloth wherever the location is sufficiently aristocratic, there was a Jew with a face like a vulture, who always went the maximum. They told me he was a cent. per center over in your gay metropolis. Well, sir, he did not realise, but he did not much seem to mind, and for all I know to the contrary, he's punting there still. The occupation seemed to soothe him. Then there was your humble servant. Well, sir, I punted a bit for the honour of my country, and so did Elizabeth, and how do you suppose we stood at the finish?"

"Lost?" I inquired.

"No, Mister Attorney; no, sir. Between us we

realised the stakes. We paid our bill at the Hôtel de Paris, and all our incidentals, and we came away with a trifle over five thousand dollars, playing moderately. So I reckon we weren't exactly skinned. There's pickings on our carcasses yet. No, squire, if you don't care to win one way or the other, not even for the fun of the thing, you generally do win. At least that's my experience. The luck leaves you when you have to plank your dollars in airnest."

I expressed my concurrence in these maxims as being thoroughly philosophical, and Mr. Rock received my congratulations with solemn complacency.

"And now, squire," he said, "we'll have a quiet night of it, unless you are of the contrary disposition. I've had enough of racket for a week or two. It's only five o'clock. We'll dine first, go to opera afterwards, and wind up at the Café de la Paix. It's near our hotel, and the victuals are good."

There was no gainsaying these hospitable proposals, and we carried them out to the letter. Elizabeth, I remember, wore a white dress, with a brooch, necklace, and a bracelet of magnificent black pearls. Mr. Rock was the American citizen, with what he called a "hammer-claw" and a huge lay-down collar, and a cataract of black satin falling down his chest, and fastened by a diamond brooch over which his clean-shaved, clear-cut, pallid features, set, as it were, in his

long black hair, were almost ghastly in their total absence of anything like colour.

It was a pleasant enough night—I ought indeed to say more than pleasant, and after we had deposited Elizabeth at the Grand, Mr. Rock and I smoked some of his cigars, which were genuine Cubas of the Rothschild brand, and drank juleps of his own mixing, and listened to the plashing of the fountain until an early hour.

“I expect big news to-morrow, senator,” said my future father-in-law, as I left; “they’ve cabled me to expect important advices; and my gell ’ll be tired. Guess I’ll look you up, with or without her as the case may be, about two o’clock. There’s one blessing about oil; it runs of itself. You can reckon on it for a moral, else these cussed cables would have made me a bit on-easy.”

At the idea of anything occurring that could possibly afford Mr. Rock grounds for “oneasiness,” we both laughed, but yet Mr. Rock was evidently grave and thoughtful, and shook hands with me as if he were glad upon the whole that the day was over.

I turned out on to the Boulevards, walked to Meurice’s and was soon fast asleep, without the least anxiety on my part as to what the to-morrow might or might not bring forth.

Next morning I refreshed myself with a brisk stroll

in the Champs Elysées, breakfasted at Bignon's, read the latest procurable copy of the *Times*, and then walked back to my hotel to write some letters.

It was a lovely morning. Rain had fallen before sunrise and was still glistening on the trees. The Paris sparrows were chirping as noisily as if they were awaiting their old friend of the Tuileries, and eager to dive into his pockets, perch on his shoulders, and peck crumbs out of his hand.

I purchased Zola's latest—not that I care for that talented author, but out of curiosity to see to what further lengths he had permitted himself to venture, and then loitered back to Meurice's.

I was lazily interested in a more than usually fetid chapter when Mr. Rock was announced. I could see at once that something had happened to strangely disturb him. His long and pale face was longer and paler than ever, and his solemn expression more solemn.

He shook hands gravely, but without any cordiality that I could detect, and then plunged himself into an arm-chair and threw up his feet on the table. I waited, wondering what all this might mean.

"I guess, squire," said he, in a somewhat parched tone of voice, "I'll put myself outside a flash of lightning. My throat's as dry as a copper-smelting stack."

"The flash of lightning" having been produced, in the shape of a *caraffe* of cognac, Mr. Rock, to my

surprise, put himself rapidly outside several "flashes" in rapid succession.

"Cognac," said he, "as you get it in Paris, is like Røederer as you get it in St. Petersburg. It's almost too good a drink for sinful mortals. But I want it this morning, as sartain as my name is Cyrus Napoleon Washington Q. Rock.

And he took another flash. Then he expanded his chest, and took up his parable.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

"SQUIRE," Mr. Rock said, "I'm no good on the stump. I am no orator as Brutus is, but as you know me, squire, a plain blunt man that love my friend. And so, squire, I am not going to see you let into the hole. Not for Cyrus Napoleon. Squire, no man was ever so eternally and all-firedly busted up as is your humble servant at this juncture of events. Squire, my wells are petered out. They air run dry. Look at this here cable from my agents." And he handed me a long cablegram which sufficiently bore out his assertion.

The wells had ceased to yield. The supply of oil had stopped altogether. Nothing came up but sand and slime, which choked the pipes. The men had all "vamoosed." Everything at the wells was deserted, and Rockburg had become in a week a Tadmor in the Wilderness.

I expressed my sorrow and surprise as well as I could, but suggested that it was fortunate that Mr. Rock had still his little pile.

"Yes, squire," said he, "that would be fortunate, if I still possessed it. It would, as you say, be a con-

solation in the midst of this eternal smash. But, squire, things never come single. You remember your great London crash,—the memorable Black Monday—when, to the astonishment of the city, the house of Overend and Gurney did not draw up its shutters and open its doors as per usual. Or, if you do not remember it, you have heard of it. Wal, squire, if you look at your *Times* to-day you will see, when it comes in, that the house of Day, Bold & Co has collapsed, and that its creditors are expected to realise something like a red cent. in the spread eagle. I could have stood either of these two facers singly. But the two of them, one fair and square in each eye, has poleaxed yours obediently. I have, squire, just a few dollars left here to my credit at Lafitte's, and I must pay up my hotel bill and make tracks."

And he took some more brandy, gulping it down without any water. I had never seen a man drink brandy so recklessly before without the least effect being produced upon him by it. He took it as if it were lemonade, and it certainly seemed to steady him.

"It is bad news, indeed, Mr. Rock," I said, "and from all I know of oil, I am afraid it's hopeless, and the oil is not more likely to run again than the Day, Bold & Co. to liquidate favourably. Business first, Mr. Rock. Consider me your banker for the present. I can't draw to an unlimited amount, but I can draw for a cou

of thousand any day without troubling my head to consult my banker's."

"You are very good, squire. We shall be leaving Paris immediately. Of course, I shall realise my effects here—the tomfooleries I and my gell have been amusing ourselves with—but a few dollars from you to help us back across the pond may prove acceptable. And they shall be repaid, squire. But now, squire," he continued, very seriously, "there's another matter. This marriage between you and my gell must be broken off. It was another thing when she had a pile. Now there isn't a thin plaster knocking round to buy hairpins; and we Rocks air too proud to let our gells marry above their pecuniary station. Elizabeth concurs with me in them sentiments, and we shall have to wish you an adoo." And he gulped down some more brandy and rose to his feet.

"We are shifting from the Grand, and Elizabeth is at this moment looking out for diggings somewhere down by the Jardin des Plantes. It's handy to Notre Dame, and she likes the music there. They'll take in my letters at the Grand."

I had always considered myself a man of resources, but I did not see my way to expostulate with simple Spartan resolution of this kind. I felt that it would have been hopeless, so I said:

"Well, Mr. Rock, as you will not be leaving Paris

for a day or two yet, we needn't talk business any more at present. If I can be of any use to you in the States I'll come over, but I fancy there's no flesh on the bones to be quarrelled over."

"Not a scrap, squire," assented Mr. Rock.

"However, I'll come over if you like. It rests with you. And now would you like some more cognac?"

"No, thank you, squire. I've drank more cognac this morning than they'll pump ile at Rockburg for centuries to come. But I'll pull myself together with a cigar, if you'll let me. I have a few of my own left," he added. And he produced a case of colossal regalias. "My gell, squire, took a fancy to this case. I didn't like it so well as the one you gave me, but I carried it to-day to please her."

It was a curious piece of filagree work in oxydised silver, with a design chased upon it which for a moment puzzled me.

"That design, Mr. Severn, is an allegory. It represents Moses striking the rock and making the water gush out. I thought it was appropriate when I ordered it to be executed. It is symbolical of Providence guiding me, Cyrus Rock, to strike ile. But somehow the parallel don't seem to hold."

I could have burst out laughing were it not that Mr. Rock spoke with such deep feeling and evident sincerity.

"And now, Mr. Rock," I said, "you had better stop in England. Surely you will do so as soon as your affairs in the United States are wound up. There will be plenty of room for you in our house—I mean, of course, Elizabeth's house and mine; and on the whole we shall be happier than if we had to cross the Atlantic every time we wanted to see each other. Besides, it will be pleasant for us to be all together when I fix upon a little box in the country, which I have not yet done."

"Ah! There we come to it, Mr. Severn. There must be no mistake here. This match is off. My gell is too proud, and so am I, to have it said that we allowed you to marry a pauper. I quite understand, as a gentleman, your sense of honour stands you to the contract, and no doubt people will think the better of you for it, as they ought to do. But that kind of feeling must not be mixed up in business. I have my sense of honour, squire, and so has my gell, quite as strong as any Britisher, without intending anything personal to yourself. And it isn't what people would think of you, but it's what people would think of us, and say of us too. No, Mr. Severn, our two minds are fixed square. And the marriage is as dead as my wells. I'm sorry for it. But it's a plain, simple duty, and there's no going back from it; and between Cyrus Rock and his duty not even the President of the United States shall put his veto."

Mr. Rock seemed thoroughly in earnest, and I felt that it would have been idle for the present to contradict him.

"Well, anyhow, you will dine with me quietly to-night at Bignon's. We can have a private room."

"I will come myself, squire, and Elizabeth shall come if she is equal to it; but I guess she will be pretty considerably fatigued, as she has been round to all the shops this morning trying to get them to take back the tomfooleries we've purchased of them, at their own valuation, and her legs 'll be weary with the tramp, strong as she is, for it's a stiffish round."

"Well," said I, "I shall wait here till you come anyway. I must insist on your bringing Elizabeth, Mr. Rock, if you have to carry her yourself. You must argue it with her."

"Wal, squire, you shall have your way; and naow I'll bid you good morning." And after another immense dose of brandy, and a grip of the hand that would have done credit to a blacksmith, Mr. Rock stalked down the staircase.

I put on my hat and walked slowly out into the gardens of the Tuileries. After all, what did it matter to me, sorry as I was for Mr. Rock, if I could only persuade Elizabeth to change her mind. I had never cared for her so much as now that I saw the chance of losing her. I had been ready to give up anything for

her, even my profession; and it would be Quixotism on her part not to give up a really foolish question of pride for me. I could not see it in any other point of view. The more I looked at matters, the more I became convinced that I was in the right, and that Mr. Cyrus Rock was in the wrong.

This is a way with young men, from which I was by no means exempt. But I resolved that I would let matters rest for some hours at any rate, if not for some days.

So we dined that evening at Bignon's, and the catastrophe of the "petered out wells" was not so much as alluded to. Mr. Rock was apparelled as usual, with the exception of the diamond in his cravat and his repeater and chain, all of which articles were conspicuously absent.

Elizabeth wore a plain and simple dress, with jet brooch and solitaires, and was sheltered from the evening air by a dark cloth jacket. There was the usual chatter about things in general, and I could not but admire the fortitude with which both the father and the daughter bore so crushing a reverse.

I walked part of the way home with them, and bade them good-night at an omnibus station, from which they took their departure in the direction of the artier Latin.

Then I strolled for awhile on the Quays "and so,"

as Pepys has it, to Meurice's and to bed, where I fell asleep, determined to have my own way, but feeling very distinctly that the Rocks were awkward customers, and that all my work was cut out for me.

As I have said, I had never cared so much for my *fiancée* as I did now, and the thought of her troubles and anxieties distressed me beyond measure. "I will conquer that Quixotic determination on Mr. Rock's part," I said to myself. "Nothing shall stop my marriage with Elizabeth. The old gentleman was ready to heap money upon me when he had got it, and now that he is ruined, he shall share my lot."

Throughout this narrative I have never attempted to gloss over my faults and failings, my errors and imperfections, or to conceal the selfishness of my nature—a quality by no means singular in my sex. It is therefore only fair to myself to state that upon this occasion I was guided by no unworthy motives, and that in all I said and did, my first thought was for the woman I truly and honestly loved, and my second for the man whom I sincerely respected, and with whose misfortunes I deeply sympathised.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEXT morning Mr. Rock came round. He was as cheerful as if nothing had happened: in the frame of mind of a man who knew the worst.

"Squire," said he, "among my many varied experiences I was once a mason. They were renovating some blocks in Broadway. Mine was a humble position. I was down on the pavement stirring up the concrete. Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, a man comes down from the top of the very highest combination of ladders lashed together, and is deposited on the pavement. We were going towards him to pick up the pieces, but he pulled himself together on his hind legs, as a citizen of the United States ought to do. 'Thank Providence, my friends,' says he, 'that little job's over for the present.' Them's my sentiments at this minute, Mr. Severn."

I complimented him on his perfect appreciation of the principles of the Stoic philosophy, and then asked after Elizabeth.

"She's a good gell, Mr. Severn. She's a gell with grit and pluck. She'll pull bow oar in the same boat

with her old dad yet. I don't mean to deny that she's a bit annoyed. It's hard to lose your dollars and come down to dimes. But she holds on wonderful." And after this Mr. Rock left.

For some time I meditated. Then I went out into the open air. Then I came back and meditated again. Then I was driven direct to the American Legation. My name and position at the English Bar were sufficient introduction, and I was at once in presence of the senior attaché. He was a typical American, hailing from Boston. I soon satisfied him as to who I was. Then I told him that I required his services in a delicate matter, which was purely personal. He was very busy at the time of my call, but he was courtesy itself, and he made an early appointment with me.

American gentlemen are said to be rare. But when you do meet one, he is the finest gentleman in the world.

The next day I called upon him at four o'clock. After the customary cordial shake of the hand, he went into business.

"Well, Mr. Severn," he said, "your business is not exactly of a diplomatic character, and it does not come within the range of my functions to aid you in any way except as a personal friend, which I hope from this time I may consider myself. But we have a young fellow here in the Legation, and I have sent him round,

quite unofficially, to see Mr. Rock. Oddly enough, he comes from the neighbourhood of Rockburg, and his mother is eighth cousin nine times removed, or something of that sort, from Mr. Rock himself. You must distinctly understand, Mr. Severn, that these negotiations are absolutely private. I am acting entirely as your personal friend. If you come here to the Legation as an American subject and tell me you want five dollars, I refer you to the Consulate. If you want something entirely different, I consider it, and I either drop the matter like a hot potato, or I carry it through. I cannot promise you success, but time shows everything. Sometimes you measure it by seconds, and sometimes by hours. But we all of us have a limited pull at it."

I then had some business negotiations with the attaché, which were not at all difficult, as I had taken the precaution of providing myself with notes of the Bank of France. The amount I need not trouble myself to state, but the notes themselves were indisputable, and the attaché promised me that the source from which they came should not be known. Then I loafed about the Boulevards until night had run more than a quarter of her time. And so ended not an eventful lay so much as a day of heavy business.

In the morning I waited events, and at about ten I received a letter—rather a stiff one—from my friend

of yesterday, the attaché. He told me almost in so many words that he had gone out of his way to help me, and that if I had not made a fool of him, Mr. Rock at all events must have made a fool of me. That Mr. Rock was in no need of money at all, and had offered to cash the cheque of the Legation in Napoleons, allowing for the rate of the day's discount on the Bourse, for any amount they pleased.

"There must be some extraordinary blunder somewhere, Mr. Severn," the letter concluded. "I acquit you of any ill intention. But the blunder has certainly not been on my part. The money you placed in my hands I now return to you; and I have the honour to be," etc., etc.

This communication puzzled me more than ever. I had intended to do good by stealth, without the least desire that I should blush to find it fame, and here I was written down an ass. I have not hitherto touched on my own self-respect, but it must be admitted that the situation was exasperating. Explain matters away how I might, everybody would believe I had made a fool of myself. And I had done worse. I had done so in the most public manner. Next day, in all human probability, the whole story would be in the *Figaro* and in the *petite presse*. I felt beside myself with rage.

I left Meurice's and strolled into the gardens of
Jack and Three Jills.

the Palais Royal. I stuffed my pockets on the way with *bonbons*, with which I tempted the children, to the consternation and indignation of their *bonnes*. I turned into a billiard *salon*, and had an hour during which my troubles never crossed my brain. I threw the marker some money, and told him he could keep the change if he could beat me. All the skill of my old days broke out again. The marker was nowhere. At the end of the hour he tendered me my change with profuse compliments, and seemed very much astonished that I did not take it.

Billiard markers are accustomed to the seamy side of society. My own private impression is that this particular marker considered me a flat, and he at once procured a substitute, lest I should come back repenting of my generosity, and insisting that I had made a mistake.

Then I returned to Meurice's, threw myself on the sofa, and speculated in a listless and dreamy way on everything.

Have you ever looked through a kaleidoscope? You see a most gorgeous arrangement in every colour of the rainbow. You rotate the tube by an inch or a fraction of it; the phantasmagoria tumbles to pieces, and another vision of beauty arises in its place. I seemed to feel the spirit of a true philosopher creeping over me.

"I will realise my money," I said to myself, "and invest it carefully. I will have a little *pied-à-terre* in Hampshire within sound of the sea. In London I can quarter myself where I please. I will get a schooner yacht, not ostentatious but seaworthy, and I will roam the rest of my life without any definite purpose. When the place suits me, I will stop for just as long as I please. When it does not suit me, I will go elsewhere. Nothing can add to my present success in my profession. All else that will come to me will come as a matter of course, and not in consequence of any labour or exertion on my own part. I have done the work of my life, and, thanks to my great luck, have got it over early. Now I will take the quiet, tranquil enjoyment."

I had almost forgotten Mr. Rock; and feeling as comfortable as a sailor in his hammock, I let my thoughts drift towards him. It would be best after all to make one more attempt. No doubt the man considered me an adventurer. That was his ignorance. But I wished to end with him in a friendly understanding at any rate. And I had also something very much stronger than a sneaking desire to see Elizabeth once more.

So I lay on my sofa turning things over, and relieving my meditations by constructing geometrical

patterns out of the paper on the walls, and listening to the twitter of the sparrows on my balcony, and to the chimes of the clocks, when suddenly the waiter made his appearance, with a double allowance of obsequiousness in his usual Parisian manner, and murmured,—

“Monsieur, Monsieur Rock est en bas.”

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. ROCK stalked into the room with a cigar in his mouth. I noticed also that his watch and chain and rings and diamond studs were, as he himself would have phrased it, in their appropriate locality. Here clearly was a new move in the game. But as it was Mr. Rock who came to me, it could only mean a point in my favour.

He shook me by the hand, grasping it as if he were attempting to squeeze water out of a piece of quartz. Then he ensconced himself in the corner of a lounge.

"Squire," said he, "I owe you a very long and a very big apology. Don't interrupt me, squire, because my buzzum is full, and I must speak my piece before I get off the stump."

I gravely inclined my head in assent.

"Squire, my gell is my only child. I love her for herself, and I love her for the sake of her mother, who, although she was an Irishwoman from Tipperary, with a tongue from Cape Horn to Baffin's Bay, and the temper of a smelting furnace, is now a saint in

heaven, or ought to be. Squire, I've taken liberties with you. That demands an apology. I tender that apology now. You didn't misunderstand me, squire. But I misunderstood you. When there are dollars about, you will allus find ring-tailed squealers, and likewise copperheads. Squire, I'm a bit fixed. I've got to beg your pardon. Since I struck ile, every man has begged my pardon, so I've had no trouble that way. Before I struck ile, if a man didn't beg my pardon when it was on the cards that he ought to do so, I went for him. I usually pulled off the deposits. Here I am, squire, to beg your pardon, and actually to dip the stars and stripes for playing it down low on you."

It seemed like a dream. To assure myself that I was in the land of the living, I shook hands with Mr. Rock once again, to the imminent danger of my palm and knuckles.

"I've played it down on you, squire," repeated Mr. Rock. "I felt it was my plain and straightforward duty so to do. Do you forgive me for so doing?"

"Mr. Rock," I replied, "you're a trump; what I believe you would call the 'right bower.' Now, where is Elizabeth, and how is she? It seems to me, unless there is any difficulty with her, that our business is over."

"Quite right, squire," said Mr. Rock; "right you are. No occasion for playing out any more chin music. We understand one another, and we don't want any

Alabama Treaty, unless it can put work in your way as a rising British lawyer, in which event I should welcome the negotiations."

"But where is Elizabeth?" I again inquired, not unnaturally.

"She is round at the Grand, squire, where dinner is waiting for us at seven. Squire, I have taken a liberty, and risked myself on a chance. I did not know how events might turn out. Nor, for the matter of that, did my gell. 'Dad,' she said, 'you've riled him past everything.' Thank the powers! squire, I haven't. But I've a few friends round to-night at the Grand, who know nothing of matters. I should like you to meet them. I've got most of our Embassy and some friends of my own; and, please the poker, we'll play the game through. I shall expect you, squire, at seven."

And with no more ado, Mr. Rock took his departure. From my balcony I saw him walking along the Rue de la Paix, with his hands in his pockets, his hat on the back of his head, and his chest inflated, as becomes a citizen of the United States who has struck oil.

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The dinner was solemn and pompous. The resources of the hotel must have been taxed to the utmost. The table in its centre was a mass of rare

exotics and orchids. There were about two waiters to each chair. The menu was a work of art, and on its back were the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes amicably intercrossed. There were great pyramids of ice dispersed on small tables to cool the room; and when the dinner was over there were professional singers—I need not give their names, but they were the best known in Paris—who, to judge by their exertions to do full justice to their powers, must have been royally paid.

In some fear and trembling, I anticipated an oration from Mr. Rock, announcing the turn events had taken. He had more tact than I had credited him with. He had whispered the secret to each guest at the door, and had intimated his express desire that there should be no “orating.”

The one exception to this golden rule was found in the French Under-Secretary of Marine, with any number of decorations, from the Legion of Honour downwards, who rose to his feet and said,—

“Mademoiselle and gentlemen, let us drink all to the United States, the most free and most Republican country upon which the sun rises and sets.”

Then the senior attaché of the American Legation, wholly devoid of even a scrap of ribbon, pulled himself up to his full height of about six feet and as

many inches,—for he hailed from Kentucky,—and responded,—

“Sir, I thank you in the revered name of the Stars and Stripes.” And that was literally all. For which fact I was grateful.

. We broke up as all parties must, but next morning I was round at the Grand, punctual to the appointment I had made with Elizabeth, having first fortified myself with a brisk gallop in the Bois, and a cold plunge after it in the Seine.

The details of lovers’ conversation are tedious, monotonous, and prosaic, at least to every one except themselves. No man even at this time knew this fact better than myself. I must candidly own that I was unequal to the situation. Elizabeth helped me over the stile like a lame dog, as I was busy suggesting to her father that we should spend the day at Vincennes.

We had the day, and, for all reasonable purposes, the place entirely to ourselves. Nor was there any dialogue here worthy of record. No one of us was disposed to open the topic of Mr. Rock’s ruse. We simply chatted as a family party might between the members of which there were no family differences. It was only when I was leaving Mr. Rock at the door of the Grand that he came back to business.

“I should have liked this ceremony to have taken

place in Rockburg, or, at all events, in New York or Washington itself. But I think, under all the circumstances, it must be in England. There's St. Paul's, squire, and the Westminster Abbey, and there's St. George's, Hanover Square, and there's that old fabric, with its darned witch's hat for a belfry, closely adjacent to the Langham, and there's St. James's. But I think, squire, we'll be married, if it is all the same to you, in your own parish, and we'll give every soul in the parish a blow out, and a something by which to remember the auspicious day. We'll do the thing, squire, as it ought to be done—as befits the daughter of a simple citizen of the United States, equal and no more to all other citizens under her blessed and glorious constitution."

I told him that I left the matter entirely in his hands; but before we parted we agreed that what Mr. Rock profanely denominated the fixture, should have its venue in my own parish church at Essex, at the earliest possible date, subject to the demands of milliners and other such necessary but tiresome supernumeraries.

When I got back to my hotel I found a letter from my sister Rachel, full of the usual idle gossip. The only piece of news in it that in any way concerned myself, was that Izzie Vivian had been married three lays ago to Lord Ashford; that the tenants had had

dinner in a marquee, and that the school-children had been regaled with buns and ginger-beer, and gratified by a conjuror, and a Punch and Judy specially brought down from London for the purpose.

She could have wished the wedding had been my own, but she supposed I was old enough or at any rate sufficiently wilful, to manage my own affairs in my own way. Izzie had always been the dearest and sweetest of girls. Lord Ashford was not at all proud, although it was expected that he would shortly be made Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, a post for which his conscientiousness and immense abilities amply qualified him.

"He rides better to hounds," ended the letter spitefully, "than any man in the county, not excepting your precious self, and he is deservedly popular with everybody. He has become a sincere Christian, and taken a class in the Sunday-school, and he is writing a book called *A Fortnight among the Red Deer of the Scottish Highlands*."

If women only knew how men laugh at this kind of spitting venom without biting, I think they would give the habit up. But they imagine it to be as infallible as their crushing remark to their dearest friend,—“It is a very beautiful dress, my dear, but I wonder you should have let your dressmaker persuade you into a colour so entirely unsuited to your complexion.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

It had been arranged that we should leave Paris by the night train, and cross by the day boat from Calais, Elizabeth being, like most Americans, an admirable sailor, and loving the deck. This gave us a day to ourselves. Americans are much freer in their notions, customs, and habits than ourselves. In the East you never see your bride until it has been settled that you are to marry her, and all the preliminaries have been arranged. You have then to take her literally for better or for worse. You may find her forty instead of twenty; fat and frowsy instead of fragile and fair. You have bought your pig in a poke, and you must stand by your bargain.

France—about Germany I cannot speak—comes very close to the land of the Prophet. The marriage is an arranged matter. You see the young lady once or twice, and remark that it is a beautiful day, and she replies that you are right. That is about the extent of your courtship.

My English readers will probably agree with me that our own customs are more sensible, and more

adapted to that freedom which is the natural heritage of man. In America, when an engagement is "fixed up," the two young people have the most absolute liberty, and use it. The swain goes about with his *fiancée* as if she were his wife. A chaperon is a thing unknown. He takes her to the opera; he drives her out; he takes her to dinner at Delmonico's; he goes round with her on visits to her friends and his; and, if he be living *en garçon*, she comes and visits him at his chambers or other quarters.

This apparent licence is hardly ever abused. Any attempt to trespass upon it would be resented by the six-shooter and by public opinion.

I consequently had a most cheerful time of it up to the very day of our wedding, which, as Mr. Rock wished, took place in our parish church. Let me give a brief idea of the day's proceedings, which Mr. Rock took into his own hands, remarking that he wished to see the thing put through according to his own notion.

We all stayed for a week at my father's house, and I could not help noticing, although it was no part of my duty to show my consciousness of the fact, that a sun such as that which fell on Danaë seemed suddenly to gild the place. The neglected gardens became trim. The paths were radiant with new gravel. The interior of the house seemed to be renovated, without any change wrought or violence done to its old, quiet,

sombre aspect. The lawns were mowed—a process of which they stood in sad need—and the borders of the shrubberies became gay with flowers.

My father told me one morning that I had always been the best of sons, and that he had always confidently predicted my success to everybody. After which he went down himself into the cellar, and returned with a pint bottle of madeira, bottled by my great-grandfather, and conscious of three voyages round the Cape.

We discussed this in what he called his study, where he kept his few volumes of law, as befits a justice of the peace, and his boot-trees and his guns and his fishing-rods and his account-books. Library in the room there was none, but on the lower shelf of the vacant bookcase was a leaden jar of tobacco, and round about it were clay pipes from the village inn. The floor was of old oak, and as there was no carpet, a spittoon was an unnecessary luxury.

“Jack,” said my father, “I am proud of you. You always were, and you have always remained, my favourite child. Little as you may guess it, I have, with a father’s eye, carefully superintended every step and stage in your education; and my grey hair will go down with pride to the grave to see that my efforts have been crowned with success, and that I have a son who is worthy of the family name and of myself. You are a

man now, Jack, I am speaking to you as an equal. My few years are numbered, and I have nothing for which to wish. But I should like to see the dear old place come down unencumbered, without any cutting of timber, or any such painful extremity. I think, Jack, that my credit at the bank is still sufficiently good for you and me to manage this between us, without your entailing upon yourself more than a nominal responsibility. God bless you, my boy, and God bless the lovely and most charming young lady who is to become your wife."

Before the interview was over my father was the happier by a few bank-notes with which I had provided myself in lieu of a cheque, guessing that his account would be overdrawn, and fearing a stoppage in transitu.

That evening I had a walk with Elizabeth round what was still called the home farm. It had ceased to be the home farm for many years, having been let to a west end milkman. It was a pretty little place, with paddocks and cowhouses, and old plane trees and low hawthorn hedges, red and white, which in the twilight threw out a marvellous fragrance, making the air heavy and happy.

"Jack," she said, "we are going to entirely change all our relations in life,"

To this undeniable and most business-like statement I gave my concurrence.

"Well, Jack, it's due to yourself to tell you why father acted as he did. And it's still more due to father, who is the best old man on two legs in this universe. Father thought you were after our dollars. Everybody told him so. And it's no good pretending we haven't dollars, Jack, because we have, as everybody knows from San Francisco harbour light round to the Golden Horn. So father said he'd play a bit of euchre, and he ordered me to hold my tongue. Of course I had to obey him. I knew your cards would turn up trumps, but I won't go so far as to say that it wasn't an unpleasant time. The worst of it was that father, being uncertain in his own mind, kept on looking round at me the whole time, and wanted to know why I'd given him all this trouble. He was at me from morning to night, saying that a daughter next to dollars was the biggest plague a man could have. Well, Jack, father, as you know, has friends at the Legation, and he was able to read between the lines of your little bit of business there.

"That staggered him a little. If I had been an English girl I should have been at him night and day, crying and going into hysterics, and lying in bed. Instead of that, I went on just as usual. One morning—I can't tell you which, for the whole thing seems like

an ugly dream—father had finished his breakfast, and finished his papers, and his cigar. Then he got on the stump, or rather on the hearthrug, a stump not being handy and convenient. And I knew tolerably well what was coming, ‘Elizabeth,’ he said, ‘this Mr. Severn has cut a full hand. Air your affections still sot on him?’ Well, Jack, of course I answered that they were; and I also told father what I felt it my duty as a daughter to do, that he’d been fooling around and making himself ridiculous about nothing at all. ‘That pint,’ father answered, ‘I won’t contradict. It ain’t for me to argue with you, gell. If I were to try and clear out that location, my hands would be considerable full. And then he and I made it up. And that’s really all about it, Jack.

“But, Jack, I don’t think father in his own heart ever believed you mean. He only felt it was a kind of sort his duty to poke you up a bit, and try. Father has his own ways. They mayn’t be my ways, though it isn’t for me to gainsay them, or go contrary to them. But it will be a cold day in August before I again take any such job in hand.”

“‘All’s well that ends well,’ Elizabeth,” I answered. “I am not at all sure your father wasn’t perfectly right. He knows his way about as well as most men, and is fully entitled to his own opinion and his own course of conduct. Besides, he was most careful not to put the

least affront upon me. If I had wanted a handle against him, I couldn't have found it. It has been a funny little chapter of stories, but it's all over now."

If she had been an English girl, I should, like Tennyson's *Lord Ronald*, have "turned and kissed her where she stood." As she was American, we solemnly shook hands. I am not at all sure that I do not prefer American manners to our own.

When we arrived at the house, I found my father and Mr. Rock solemnly pacing up and down the elm avenue under the rookery. My father was radiant. He saw boundless wealth before him, to be gained by his own exertion and his own local knowledge. Mr. Rock had agreed with him that the only idea he had ever had in his own life was the very best one he could possibly have entertained. It was wonderful, Mr. Rock had observed, how my father could have hammered out an idea so uncommonly original and brilliant. What remained of the estate had obviously been intended by Providence from the very first for a large dairy farm, to be carried on in so gentlemanly a manner that a justice of the peace, with subordinates under him, could boss the concern himself, without treading on the time required by his public duties. The only thing needed was capital, which Mr. Rock was anxious to invest, being sure that the speculation was essentially sound.

Part of the estate would have to be put into swedes and mangolds, part in pasturage, to be utilised in the fall of the year as hay. Ranches must be built, and there must be a little home farm, of course, with stone floors and tiled walls, and all the rest of it, for the cream and the butter.

"Your father, Mr. Severn," said Mr. Rock, without a change in his features or a modulation in his voice, "is a very long-headed man of business. He mentioned the plan to me, and told me he had been considering it all his life, but that capital had stood in his way. Naturally I replied that I had a little capital knocking about in hard want of a sound investment, and that this seemed the soundest investment of which I had heard for many a long day."

Mr. Rock was so portentously business-like that I dared not even smile.

"But your father, Mr. Severn," he continued, "is getting too old to be worried and mused about with figures and ledgers, and that kind of routine. Besides, they do not suit the dignity of an English deputy-lieutenant and justice of the peace, so I have arranged that there is to be a working-partner, a young man I know in Jersey City, about as sharp as they make them, who will take the details out of your father's hands, leaving him unfettered in the control and administration. That young man I shall cable for, and he will

come over at once. And I think, Mr. Severn, your father sees at last how to develop his estate. I won't say there is oil in it, sir. Providence, for its own reasons, has confined oil to the United States. But there are dollars in it when it is developed. And developed it shall be subject always to the constitution of the United States."

And here Mr. Rock lit a cigar, and remarked that it was a hot day, and that he was tired of talking, and that he should like to stroll with me, and have a long drink under the elms. So we went and sat under the immense trees, talking very little but thoroughly contented, as ought to be the condition of men who have no enemies, and have satisfactorily disposed of the most troublesome among their friends.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BEFORE I turned in that night my mother sent for me to her dressing-room, when she cried a great deal, as is the habit of mothers, and also told me that I had always been her favourite child, coupling the information with some details on the circumstances of my first appearance in this world. This also is a habit mothers have, and I am not sure that their honest pride in

what are, possibly, indisputable facts is not a credit to them.

She said that Elizabeth had struck her immensely, and that I had made a match which the lord-lieutenant might envy me; and she added, with feminine power of perception, that, so far as she could see, Izzie's hair was getting thin at the parting, and that she had to lace until her nose was red. No mother ever forgives a woman who she thinks has insulted her own son.

As for our wedding, it is chronicled in the *Morning Post*, and several columns of it were cabled over by my father-in-law to the *Rockburg Gazette and Sentinel* and *Bulletin*. The village was *en fête* all day. Mr. Rock, who had taken matters entirely into his own hands, brought down a circus, which completely eclipsed the conjuror from London at the Ashford-Vivian marriage. There was open house all over the place, and if there were no charges during the next few days, Mr. Rock must have taken the precaution of squaring the local constable, for the amount of liquor in which my health and that of Mrs. John Severn was drunk, would have floated a three-decker with all her guns in her.

We left—that is to say Elizabeth and I—very soon after the cutting of the cake. Here again old Rock had made all arrangements. Money was nothing to him, and he liked people to understand as much. So

we had a special train to Liverpool Street. Never before had a special train been known to start from our own little roadside station; and at Dover we found the last triumph of Mr. Rock's sumptuousness, like the bang at the end of a squib, in a special boat to take us over by ourselves.

We walked on the deck of that boat under the stars, with the phosphorescent sea below us. It would be idle to pretend that I was not entirely and completely happy. I was also contented. And content is an adjunct to happiness, and improves it, as vinegar, chopped mint, and lump sugar improve spring lamb, although spring lamb in itself is a very admirable thing, and one mentioned with tenderness by every Brillat Savarin.

"Elizabeth," I said, as we walked up and down the deck, "I do not really think I have any secrets that I need tell you."

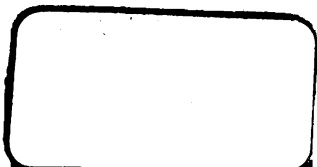
"Most men have their secrets, dear," she replied; "and if a man is a gentleman, you will always find that his secrets do him credit; so that the fools who poke their noses into them get very few cents in change for their dollar. My only secret I told out in church yesterday, and to it I mean to stick. Look at that star, Jack. I think it's Jupiter. If so, it's luck for you. Besides, I want to see his belts. Send word to the nipper to lumber round with his telescope."

This the skipper did, and the planet turned out to be Jupiter, and nothing less. After this what followed would have been more or less foolishness, had not Mrs. Severn been an American, of that marvellous race in which sentiment, however powerful, is always controlled and corrected by dry, bracing, native humour.

We paced the deck heedless of the dew, and watched the lights of other vessels crossing and passing our own, until at last through the morning mist the harbour lights of Calais showed themselves, and our vessel was warped up alongside the pier.

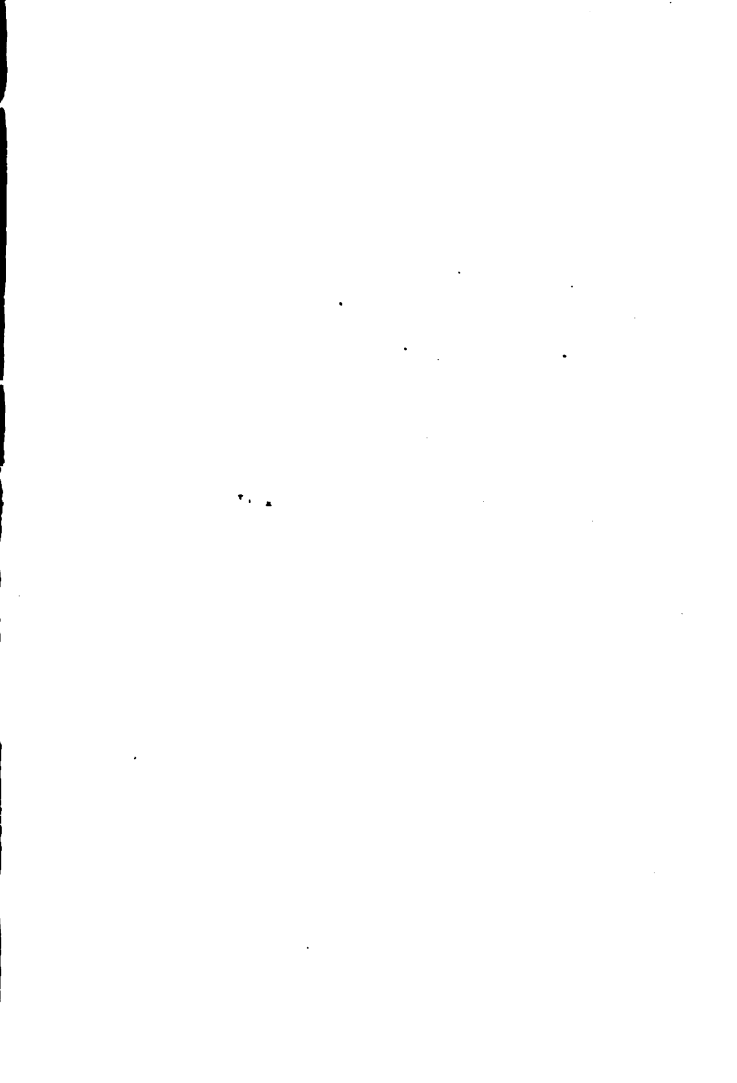
A man has no business to be always talking about himself and his own feelings. But if ever I was supremely happy it was as I went up that almost Alpine slope of gangway, with my wife's right hand on my arm, and my own right hand held over it.

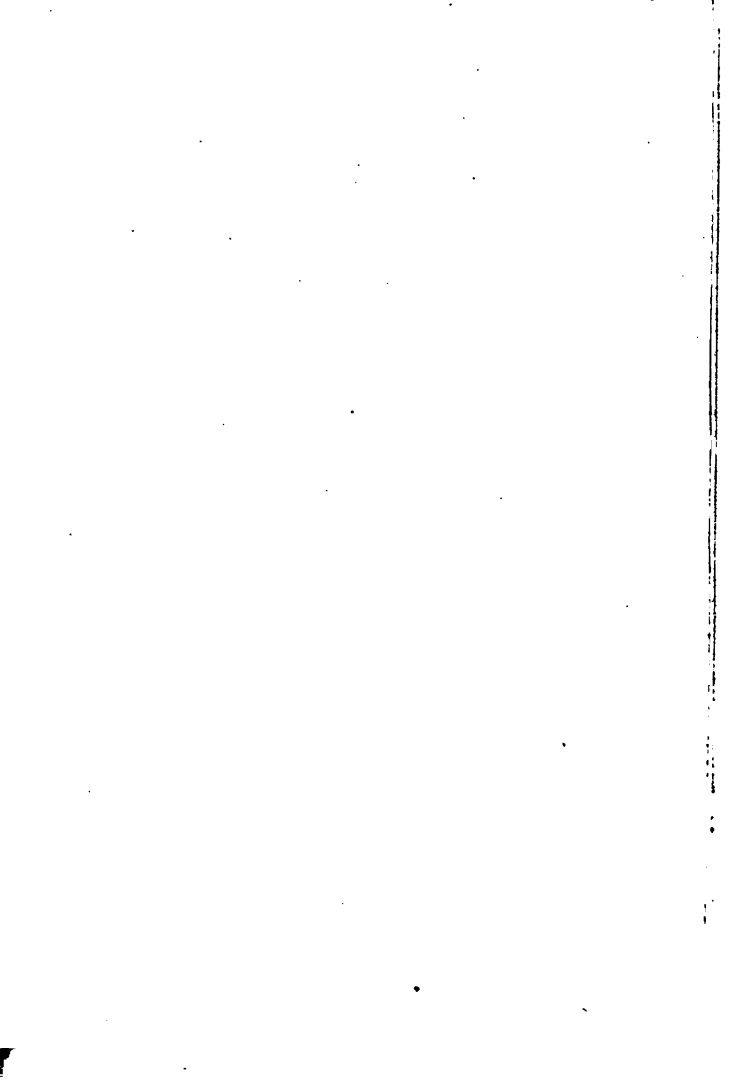
THE END.



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